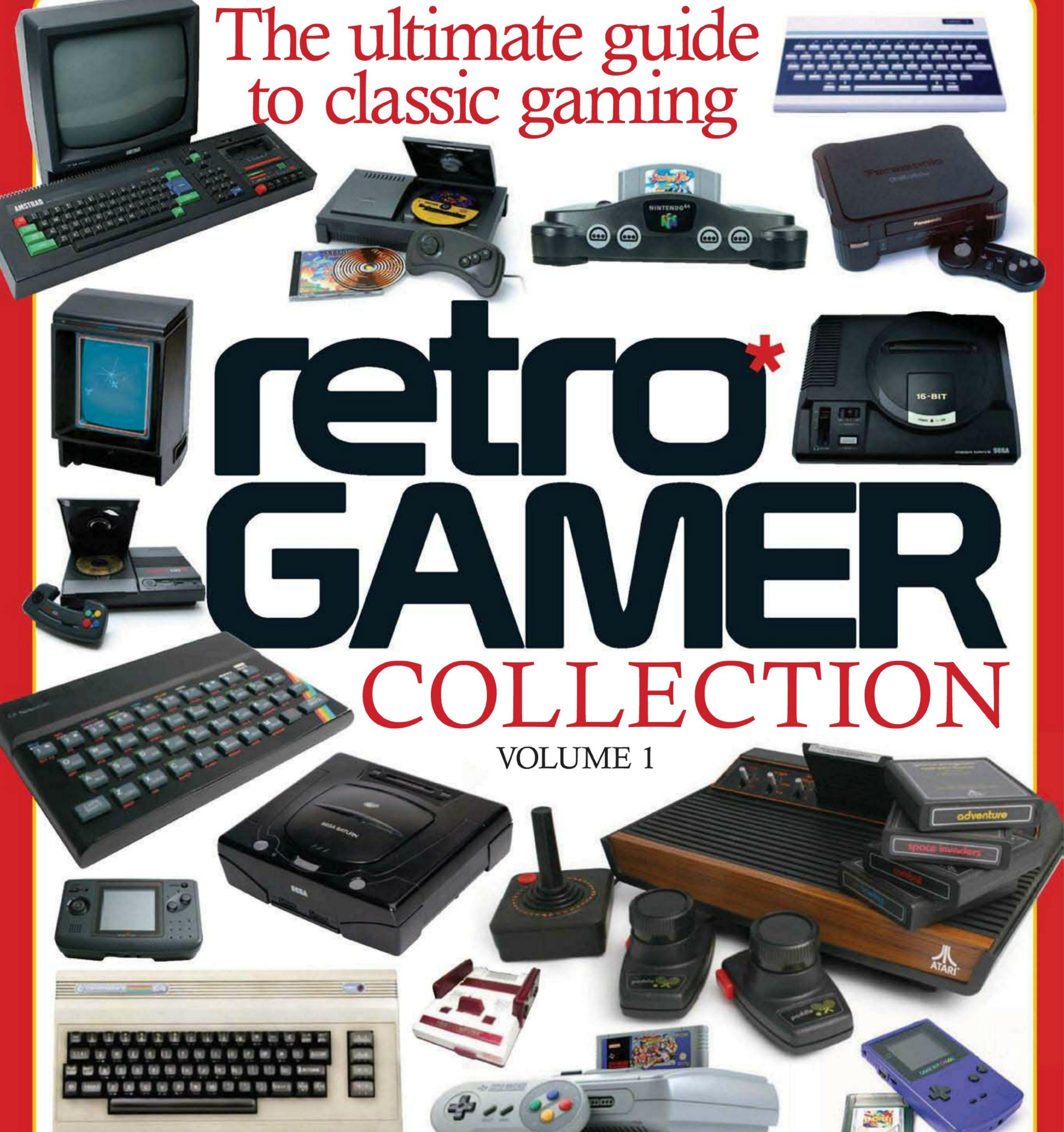
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The ultimate guide to classic gaming

retro* GAMER COLLECTION

VOLUME 1



THE COLLECTOR'S GUIDE TO VIDEOGAMING 1979-2000

256 pages of classic retro gaming inside

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IMAGINE PUBLISHING



This is it. The retro anthology you've been waiting for!



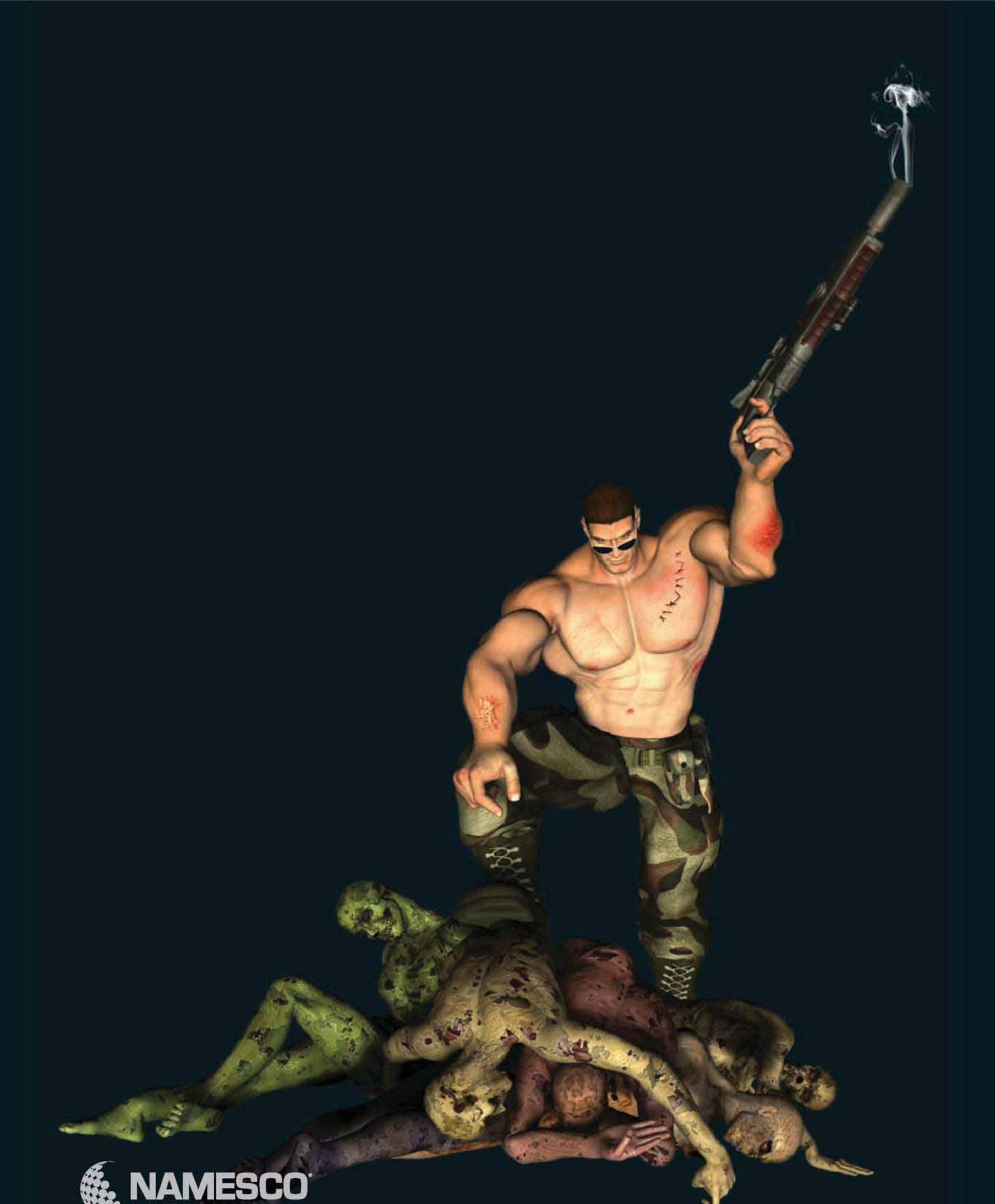
retro GAMER COLLECTION

When Imagine Publishing first acquired Retro Gamer our mission was simple: make a great publication even better. While some have not always liked the direction the new Retro Gamer has headed in (people still ask where the cover discs are) I genuinely feel that we have achieved our original lofty goal, and then some.

As the magazine has progressed over the last (at the time of writing) 18 issues, we've started up several new features, kept many of the original articles and secured more and more exclusive interviews with key developers, both past and present. Basically, Retro Gamer is going from strength to strength and while it's a result of both my – and the rest of the team's – commitment to the magazine, it's mainly thanks to you, the readers, who keep this wonderful ride going.

So here we are, with a bumper edition of everyone's favourite gaming mag. Some of you will no doubt have been with us since the very beginning but if you've just discovered us, welcome aboard. I've personally picked a selection of some of Retro Gamer's greatest articles and, with any luck, you'll enjoying reading them as much as I have.

Enjoy.


NAMESCO
A WORLD APART

retro* GAMER COLLECTION

» THE CLASSIC GAME ANTHOLOGY



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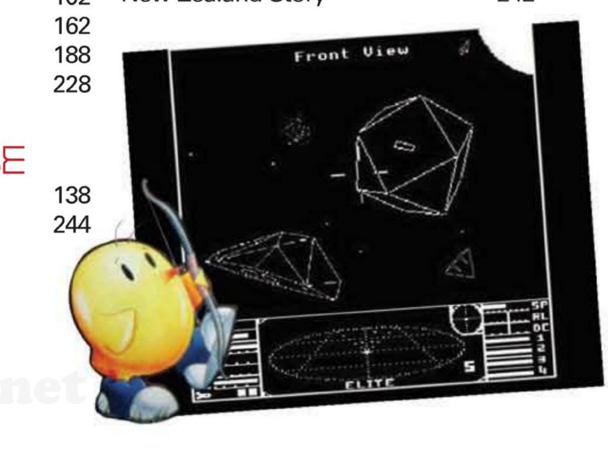
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SABRE WULF

HUNGRY LIKE THE…



- **PUBLISHER** ULTIMATE
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+



HISTORY

Sabre Wulf marked a number of firsts for me when I originally encountered it back in 1984. It was my first full-price release; finally introduced me to the wonderful games of Ultimate (hey, I was a late starter) and it's the first and only time in a videogame that I've ever been able to run after a giant pink hippo and beat it soundly on the arse!

Heading back to *Sabre Wulf* now for the purpose of this article and it's easy to see why I fell in love with it (and why I still harbour a deep fondness for it). Play *Sabre Wulf* today and you'll see that it has no pretension at all. It doesn't try to encumber the player with complicated controls or offer you unwanted gameplay elements (that are becoming common in far too many games nowadays), it simply disarms you with its captivating design, simple, yet oh so elegant graphics and the sort of intricate mazes that had me going through god knows how many pages of squared paper (I never did finish that damn map).

Indeed, it was *Sabre Wulf's* sheer vibrancy that first attracted me to it, and once I started exploring the seemingly alive jungle, I soon became completely enamoured with its subtle atmosphere. Every single screen was awash with detail and filled with all sorts of monstrous creations – I'd even hang around the game's many clearings, just waiting for that indestructible flame (and the mesmerising noise it made). Searching the expansive map for the four missing pieces of amulet became a joy, not a chore (even though I never found more than three parts), and I soon lost count of the many hours that I spent with the intrepid Sabreman.

Even today, *Sabre Wulf* still manages to hold a beguiling enchantment over me – so much so that I even forgive Rare for its GBA remake – and it remains one of my favourite 8-bit titles of all time. Maybe it's the nostalgia talking, or it could be down to how much I spent on it, but in my mind, *Sabre Wulf* is and always will be utterly superb.




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Year Released: 1982

Original Price: £125 (£175 48k)

Buy it now for: £10+

Associated Magazines: Crash, Your Sinclair, Sinclair User, Sinclair Programs, Sinclair Answers, ZX Computing

Why the Spectrum was great… Owning a Spectrum was like being part of a secret club. Like-minded gamers who knew what it meant to type out hundred-line pokes, wait ten minutes for *The Hobbit* to load, and had mastered the art of tape-to-tape copying.



sinclair ZX Spectrum





THE HUMBLE SINCLAIR SPECTRUM WAS SMALL AND UNASSUMING, YET IT MANAGED TO CONQUER THE UK COMPUTER MARKET DURING THE EIGHTIES AND WAS COMMERCIALLY VIABLE FOR MORE THAN A DECADE. DURING THIS TIME THE MACHINE WON THE HEARTS OF MILLIONS AND A THRIVING FAN SCENE NOW EXISTS. MARTYN CARROLL LOOKS BACK AT THE LITTLE COMPUTER THAT OVERCAME THE ODDS AND MADE IT BIG

Having made a name for himself in the electronics field, releasing everything from pocket calculators to tiny televisions, Sir Clive Sinclair turned his entrepreneurial gaze toward computers, and in 1978 he launched the MK14. It was sold in kit form and proved to be little more than a programmable calculator but sales of over 50,000 convinced Sir Clive that there was a hunger for computers aimed at hobbyists.

In early 1980 Sinclair released the ZX80, a diminutive home computer with a touch-sensitive membrane keyboard and just 1K of memory. It too was sold in kit form for £79, but crucially a pre-built version was available for £99, opening up the world of computers to more general home users who weren't prepared to whip out a soldering iron and start bolting bits together. However, it was the ZX80's successor, the enhanced and improved ZX81 that really kick-started the home-computing craze in the UK. Released in March 1981 and available for either £49 (kit form) or £69 (pre-built), the ZX81 clocked up sales of more than 400,000 in a little over 12 months. Sinclair had devised the ultimate entry-level computer and the British public were buying into it.

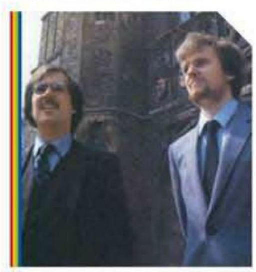
But Sir Clive wasn't about to stand idly by, counting the cheques and postal orders that were pouring into his hectic mail order department. The industry he'd had a hand in creating was moving fast, very fast, and competitors were queuing up for a piece of the pie. To compound matters, the cost of components and memory was tumbling all the time, allowing more manufacturers to tap into the low-cost computer market that belonged almost exclusively to Sinclair. Plus, there was the small matter of Acorn beating Sinclair to a lucrative BBC contract that would ultimately see Acorn computers installed in classrooms up and down the country. It was time for Sir Clive to dig in and fight his corner.

To this end, Sinclair began to mastermind the ZX82 and ZX83 models. The former would supersede the ZX81, adding sound

Tech specs

A trusty Zilog Z80A chip running at 3.54MHz powered the Spectrum. The machine was available with either 16K or 48K of RAM, and Sinclair BASIC was provided on a 16K ROM chip. The video display could output a total of 24 lines of text with 32 character positions and 192x256 pixels for high-resolution graphics. The Spectrum had very few external connectors. There was TV out, ear and mic ports to connect a tape recorder, as well as a 28-pin expansion slot for connecting a wide range of peripherals, including joystick interfaces, printers and Sinclair's very own Microdrive storage system.

Sinclair's Richard Altwasser, who had previously helped develop the ZX81, designed the Spectrum's hardware. The ROM code was written almost entirely by Steve Vickers of Nine Tiles Information Handling Ltd (a small portion was adapted from the original ZX80 ROM code written by John Grant), while Sinclair designer Rick Dickinson created the casing and infamous 'dead flesh' keyboard.



» The men behind the Spectrum, Steve Vickers (left) of Nine Tiles and Richard Altwasser of Sinclair Research



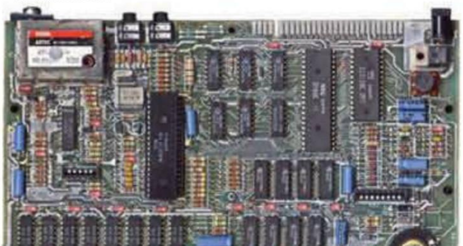
sinclair ZX Spectrum



» The MK14 was Sir Clive's first home computer and today is highly sought after by Sinclair collectors



» The first Spectrum print advert sang the Spectrum's praises – in fact, it even included a glowing quote from Sir Clive himself!



» The Spectrum was a fairly simple machine with no dedicated graphics hardware and limited expansion options (photo: Bill Bertram)



» Released in April 1982, the Spectrum went on to become the UK's bestselling home computer

capabilities, colour graphics and a moving keyboard to the mix, while the latter was hoped to seize control of the small business market.

The eventual fortunes of the two machines couldn't be more different. The ZX82 was renamed the ZX Spectrum and went on to become Britain's bestselling home computer. The ZX83, meanwhile, was launched as the Sinclair QL (Quantum Leap) in 1984 and failed to make an impression as a business machine. The QL is now regarded as an embarrassing footnote in the Sinclair story, second only to the disastrous C5 motorised tricycle (although to be honest, the C5 is probably more of an epitaph than a footnote).

RAINBOW BRIGHT

In April 1982, long before the QL and C5 tarnished Sir Clive's name, the Spectrum was launched in a blaze of publicity at the Earls Court Computer Show. Shortly after its unveiling, an advert for the new computer began to appear in specialist computer magazines. It was typically text-heavy and very Sinclair, hammering home each of the machine's 'astonishing' new features. Topping the list of key features was the Spectrum's high-resolution colour graphic capabilities. Whereas the ZX80/81 were monochrome machines, the Spectrum lived up to its name by outputting seven colours plus black. Sound support was also included, with the new BEEP command allowing you to control pitch and duration. The advert went on to reveal details of a full-size moving keyboard that would replace the plastic membrane used on the ZX80/81. To seal the deal, the Spectrum came with a very generous amount of RAM – 16K as standard, with an expanded 48K version also available.

But what about the price? Would Sir Clive be able to continue his noble aim of delivering affordable computers to the masses? The answer was a resounding yes. The 16K model was available for just £125, and for £50 more you could take home the 48K version. Compare that to the Commodore 64, which launched in the UK at £299. Or even better, the BBC Model B, which would lighten your pockets to the tune of £399. Sinclair had soundly undercut the competition and looked to have sewn up the market once again.

The advert posed a problem, however, as the Spectrum simply sounded too good to be true. All those features for such a competitive price? There had to be a catch. But before anyone could see the machine and make up their own minds, they had to suffer Sinclair's famously unreliable mail order department. Customers were advised to allow up to 28 days for delivery and yet those who'd placed their orders early typically had to wait between 12 and 16 weeks for their shiny new machines to arrive. During the latter half of 1982 Sinclair was reportedly manufacturing 20,000 Spectrums a month and was still unable to meet the huge demand. It didn't help that a quantity of machines were earmarked for overseas markets following a steady European roll out. Things did ease somewhat by early 1983, mainly because the Spectrum was made available though WHSmith and other high street chains.



» Great games that made a splash on the Speccy. From left to right: *Manic Miner, Ant Attack, Lords Of Midnight* and *Head Over Heels*

RUBBER SOUL

The advert flagged the Spectrum as a "powerful professional's computer", but in several respects the new computer was very similar to its more primitive forebears. It's believed that this was intentional on Sir Clive's part as a means of speeding up production and keeping costs down.

At first glance it was obvious that Sinclair had performed another miracle of miniaturisation. The Spectrum was just 23cm wide, 14cm long and 3cm deep. The most noticeable new addition was the small rubber keys that poked through the sleek black casing. A single sheet of spongy rubber was used and by pressing down on a key, the contact underneath was closed and then the key sprung back to its original position. It was preferable to the ZX81's touch-sensitive keyboard – and probably just as cost effective – but to call it a 'full-size, moving-key keyboard' was a little optimistic.

The actual keyboard layout was almost identical to the one that debuted on the ZX80. There were 40 keys in total, compared to an average of 60-70 keys found on computers with proper typewriter-style keyboards. The updated Sinclair BASIC retained its one-touch keyword entry system, where a typical key could be used to enter five different commands depending on which shift keys it was pressed in conjunction with. This input method baffled beginners and proved far too restrictive for more seasoned users. To complicate matters, a number of new BASIC commands were introduced, taking the total number of keyboard functions to a finger-bending 193. In some cases it would be quicker to manually type the command than press the required series of keys. Again, the advert was slightly wide of the mark with its "one-touch" keyword entry claims.

What about the new colour capabilities? Well, Sinclair actually undersold the Spectrum in this respect. There were eight basic colours, yet the BRIGHT command could be applied to every colour except black, making 15 in total. Coupled with the surprisingly high screen resolution (256 x 192 pixels), the Spectrum's display capabilities could rival machines retailing at twice the price. There was a drawback, however. To save memory, each 8 x 8 pixel square could only display a foreground and background colour. As a result, in games where a character sprite of one colour passed over a background of a different colour, the colour of the sprite would bleed into the background. This so-called colour clash effect was unique to the Spectrum, much to the amusement of Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC owners. We can now look back and say that colour clash gave Speccy games a certain charm but back in the day such wistful reasoning would never have settled those playground spats.

Rather than blast sound through your TV set, the Spectrum featured a small internal speaker. It was affectionately known as the 'beeper' because it, well, beeped, and that was about it. You could control the length and tone of the beep but not the volume, which was a shame because the speaker was barely audible in the first batch of models off the production line (later versions corrected this problem to some extent). Worse still, the speaker would temporarily freeze the processor while it played a sound. Considering what they had to work with, it's amazing that programmers managed to add sound effects and music to games at all. Even more remarkable is that musicians like Martin Galway and Tim Follin developed routines that simulated multiple sound channels. It was also possible to play sampled speech through the speaker, albeit in very crude fashion.

PLAY THE GAME

Despite these technical shortcomings, the Spectrum quickly generated a huge range of independent software. Games were incredibly popular and unofficial versions of arcade classics such as *Space Invaders, Pac-Man* and *Breakout* quickly flooded the market. Software houses that had sprung up to support the ZX81 were drawn to the new machine, attracted by its colour graphics, relatively huge memory (the 48K version at least), and rapidly growing user base.

Bug-Byte, Mikro-Gen, Quicksilva, Imagine, Ocean and dozens of other developers made a name (and a small fortune) for themselves during these early years, but one company in particular stood out from the crowd. Ashby Computer and Graphics Ltd, then operating under the trade name Ultimate Play the Game – now known as Rare – set the whole scene alight with a series of stunning Spectrum games. Its first four releases (*Jetpac, Pssst, Cookie* and *Tranz Am*) became bestselling classics that other developers could only dream of and yet they all ran on a standard 16K Spectrum. Ultimate's 48K games were bigger and better, with titles like *Atic Atac, Sabre Wulf* and *Knight Lore* whipping the computer press into a dribbling frenzy. Other ground-breaking games that debuted on the Spectrum before being ported to different machines included Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner,* Sandy White's *Ant Attack,* Mike Singleton's *Lords Of Midnight* and Jon Ritman's *Head Over Heels*, amongst many others. The Spectrum really was home to an embarrassing number of great games.

It was this catalogue of games, as wide as it was deep, that pushed sales of the Spectrum through the roof. In the run up to Christmas 1983, over 50,000 machines were sold every month in the UK. As the cost of components fell, Sinclair fuelled demand further by slashing the price of the Spectrum. The 16K model was reduced to just £99, nestling just under the psychological price barrier of £100, and the 48K version retailed at a very attractive £129.

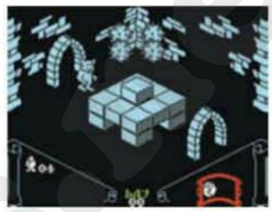
This was the Spectrum's golden period but sadly it didn't last much beyond 1984. In October of that year Sinclair released the Spectrum+, which, rather than the souped-up Speccy that buyers and retailers had hoped for, merely added a moving QL-style keyboard. Similarly, the long-awaited Spectrum 128, which received a low-key UK launch in February 1986, was essentially a Spectrum+ with 128K memory, a new three channel sound chip and an updated version of Sinclair BASIC. These updates were cautious, lazy even, perhaps because by this time, Sinclair's focus (and finances) had shifted almost exclusively to the doomed C5 project. In summer 1986 Amstrad acquired Sinclair's computing arm and went on to create Spectrum-based clones of its popular CPC range. Amstrad's +2 and +3 models were marketed as games machines and certainly attracted new buyers, but those who'd fallen in love with the ZX line would sadly never see a true successor to the Spectrum. Perhaps if Sinclair had continued to attack the competition as aggressively as it had done during the early Eighties, then a 16-bit computer capable of undercutting the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST might have been a distinct possibility. Nevertheless, a place in computing history is unreservedly set aside for the not-so-humble Sinclair Spectrum.







» Sinclair Research boss Sir Clive Sinclair, pictured here at the QL launch back in January 1984



The wonderful World of Spectrum

Speccy fans are fortunate in that one of the web's best retro sites is dedicated to the machine. World of Spectrum (www.worldofspectrum.org) contains information on more than 12,500 games, with screenshots, links to reviews and, in the vast majority of cases, downloadable ROMs that can be played on modern platforms via emulation. Don't let the presence of ROMs deter you though – webmaster Martijn van der Heide actively seeks permission from publishers to offer the games freely on the site, and will remove games if it's requested by an IP owner.

World of Spectrum celebrated its 10th birthday at the end of 2005 and at the time, we asked Martijn if he was planning to celebrate the anniversary. "Well I've added a smallish new section to the site, covering the Timex versions of the Spectrum," he replied in typically modest fashion. But what about the long-term future of WoS? "It will take several more years to update the databases so I hope to provide a more complete history over time. Other than that we are aiming to provide many more screenshots. And when more people have broadband internet we'll shift to a more glossy, interactive environment." It's safe to say we're already enjoying the next 10 years…

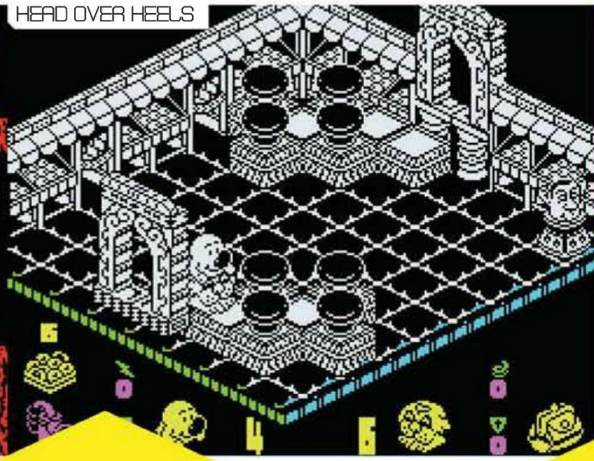
World of Spectrum is not just the best Speccy site on the web, but arguably the best retro resource full stop.

PERFECT TEN GAMES





STARQUAKE



HEAD OVER HEELS



ATIC ATAC

STARQUAKE

» **RELEASED:** 1985

» **PUBLISHED BY:** BUBBLEBUS SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** STEVE CROW

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** FIRELORD, WIZARD'S LAIR

Steve's Crow unbelievably addictive flick-screen platformer mixes pure playability with crisp sci-fi graphics and frantic puzzle solving. It's one of those games where every aspect has been polished to gleaming perfection; whether it's the mini-Mastercards that open any doors (geddit), the ability to summon temporary platforms beneath you at will or the handy passworded teleporters that make light work of navigating the immense caverns. However, it's the sheer speed of the thing that makes *Starquake* such an exhilarating experience on the Spectrum. Crow's devious mazes require serious cunning to traverse and it's all kept at a feverish pace thanks to a constant supply of energy-sapping enemies. A must for every Spectrum aficionado, *Starquake* is pure 48K bliss.

ANT ATTACK

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** QUICKSILVA

» **CREATED BY:** SANDY WHITE

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** I OF THE MASK, ZOMBIE ZOMBIE

Few games in the early Eighties were as atmospheric and downright terrifying as *Ant Attack*, the first real home videogame to be viewed from an isometric perspective. The ghostly monotone graphics only served to intensify the desolation of the abandoned walled city of Antescher and made the sudden appearance of the titular arthropods even more shocking. Typical games are spent tear-arsing around the tomb-like structures desperately following the green or red signals from your scanner to locate each lost soul. Sudden ant attacks are agile and persistent and require a dash to high ground or a well-aimed grenade to avoid. One of the few games to actually allow you to choose your sex, *Ant Attack* is still a prime example of a simple concept well implemented and burnt into the minds of a generation of gamers.

HEAD OVER HEELS

» **RELEASED:** 1987

» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** JON RITMAN, BERNIE DRUMMOND

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** NAMTIR RAIDERS, BATMAN, MATCHDAY I & II, MONSTER MAX

Pre 1987 Ritman and Drummond had toyed with the likes of the similarly isometric *Batman*. But it was with *Head Over Heels* that the duo truly achieved greatness. It's difficult to describe the impact this game had when it was released; surpassing every other 3D platformer in an instant with its relentless assault of clever ideas, kitsch graphics and surefooted game design. Ritman is a master of Rubik's Cube-style puzzles and nearly every room requires lateral thinking and more than a dash of fingertip dexterity. Dividing the *Head Over Heels* characters' abilities, so that they can only progress so far as separate entities and must literally join forces to complete the game, is a masterstroke and typical of the ingenuity that seeps from the game's every pore.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

» **RELEASED:** 1986

» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **CREATED BY:** DENTON DESIGNS

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** ENIGMA FORCE, SHADOWFIRE, WHERE TIME STOOD STILL, COSMIC WARTOAD

In the year of the space shuttle Challenger disaster, Spectrum owners were treated to one of the finest isometric adventures ever to appear on Sir Clive's rubber marvel. *The Great Escape* is set in a Colditz-style POW camp during WWII and the objective is to escape before your morale is crushed and without alerting the guards and getting thrown into the cooler. What makes the game so compelling is the attention to detail and a real sense of confinement. The graphics are finely crafted and clever little touches like the morale flag, the searchlights at night, the hidden tunnels, and the way you default to the camp routine if you stop playing, make the game a true classic. Just look at it.

ATIC ATAC

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** ULTIMATE

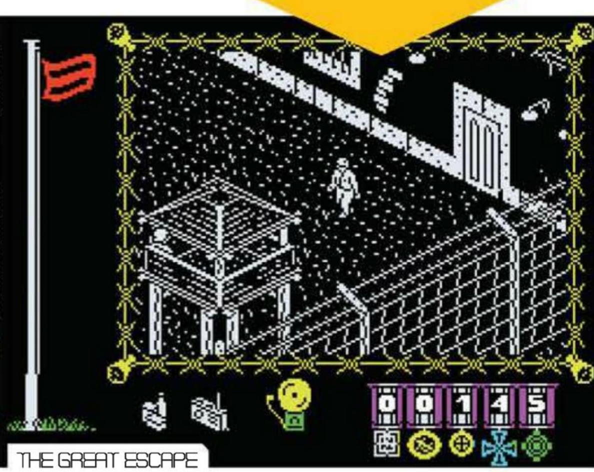
» **CREATED BY:** TIM STAMPER, CHRIS STAMPER

» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** LUNAR JETMAN, SABRE WULF, ALIEN 8, GUNFRIGHT, KNIGHTLORE

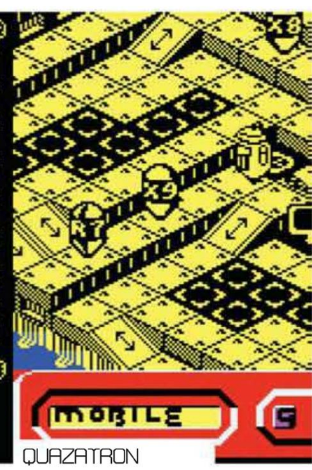
No 'perfect ten' list for the Spectrum would be complete without a solid showing from the Stamper brothers and their superb Ultimate label. *Atic Atac* makes it into the list by a narrow margin (so many Ultimate games are outright classics) because it set the scene for Ultimate to dominate the Spectrum. Playing as Knight, Wizard or Serf, *Atic Atac* is an overhead perspective arcade adventure set over 200+ rooms in a gothic castle populated by endless minions, as well as Frankenstein, Quasimodo, the Mummy and, of course, Dracula. It's fast, it's challenging, and even today it provides hours of entertainment.



ANT ATTACK



THE GREAT ESCAPE



QUAZATRON

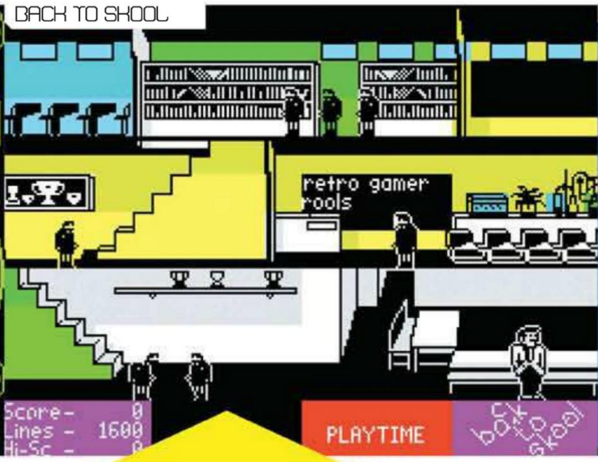


sinclair

ZX Spectrum

A magnificent machine like the Speccy deserves a well-thought-out and balanced appreciation of the ten best games. Now, before you write in, any top ten is going to be entirely subjective and of course open to violent debate, and that's what Retro Gamer is all about. Like-minded gamers indulging in sheer nostalgia. Bring it on.





BACK TO SKOOL



REBEL STAR

QUAZATRON

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
» **CREATED BY:** STEVE TURNER
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** SPACE WARS 3D, AVALON, DRAGONTORC, RANA RAMA, ZYNAPS

We're going out on a bit of a limb here because Steve Turner's *Quazatron* is not generally considered one of the top ten Spectrum games, but hey, it's our list, right? So what if it stole C64 *Paradroid's* innovative 'grappling' system, and the lifts to other levels are kinda similar, *Quazatron* certainly carved a niche for itself. You can't deny the clever use of colour, the detail on the droids and the *Marble Madness*-inspired gameplay. Where *Quazatron* scores highly is the player's desire to battle and strip the best parts from your fellow robots, boost their own abilities and then wipe each level clean before descending to the next. An undeniably magnificent game.

BACK TO SKOOL

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MICROSPHERE
» **CREATED BY:** DAVID REEDY
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** SKOOL DAZE, WHEELIE, CONTACT SAM CRUISE

Together with the original *Skool Daze, Back To Skool* represents bedroom programming at its best – quintessentially British, packed with detail and eminently playable, how could this game fail to appeal to its audience of rowdy teenagers? Allowing the player to individually name the cast of characters was Reedy's masterstroke because it meant your could personalise and relate to them instantly. What makes *Back To Skool* such a great Spectrum game, though, is the way it plays and the St Trinians-esque details, like riding the bike through the school, shooting water pistols, releasing the mouse to make the girls jump, and, of course, avoiding the cane of the sinister Mr Whacker. Fond, fond memories…

JET SET WILLY

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SOFTWARE PROJECTS
» **CREATED BY:** MATTHEW SMITH
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** MANIC MINER

The follow-up to *Manic Miner* is set in a sprawling mansion (bought with the profits from mining no doubt) and is both exciting and infuriating in equal measures. Gaming legend Matthew Smith showers you with extra lives to help you collect the 83 flashing objects – and you need them, as the difficulty level in rooms like the Banyan Tree, Out on a Limb, and the Forgotten Abbey is insane! Smith's Python-inspired characters and unforgiving gameplay has sealed *JSW's* place in Spectrum history and led to hundreds of clones, the best of which is probably Elite's *Rollercoaster*.

REBEL STAR

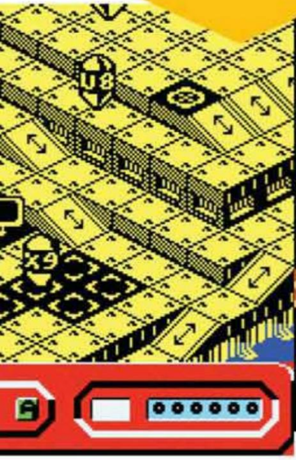
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD
» **CREATED BY:** JULIAN GOLLOP
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** CHAOS, LASER SQUAD, REBEL STAR 2, REBEL STAR RAIDERS

Just pipping Gollop's earlier masterpiece, *Chaos*, into our top ten, *Rebel Star* is a turn-based sci-fi strategy game in which you control either of two opposing forces in a moonbase battle (there was also a two-player game on the flip-side of the tape and all for £1.99!). What seals *Rebel Star's* greatness is the pure strategy and cunning that must be employed to succeed; making the best of your forces' abilities and different armaments. Julian Gollop, where are you now?

ELITE

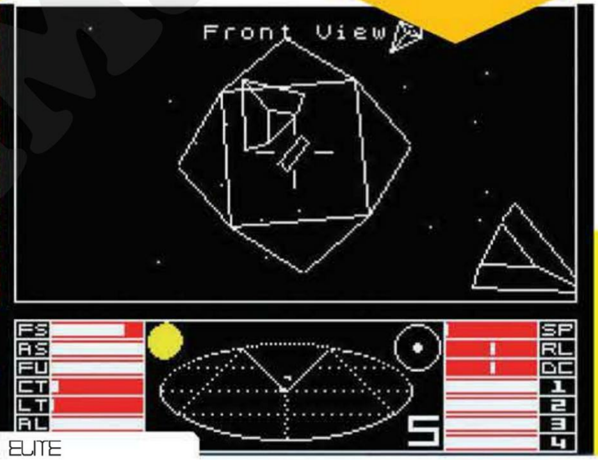
» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD
» **CREATED BY:** TORUS
» **BY THE SAME AUTHOR:** GYRON

No top ten could be complete without the obligatory conversion of the ultimate space trading game and this Torus version remains faithful to Bell and Braben's original vision while at the same time adding some enhancements. That's if you could actually play the damn thing though; *Elite* was the first ever game to utilise the Lenslock anti-piracy thingy, which managed to frustrate legitimate customers and pirates in almost equal measures. Fortunately *Elite* was worth it, with ultra-smooth and flicker-free frame rate, impressive magenta explosions, and, for the 128K at least, three special missions.





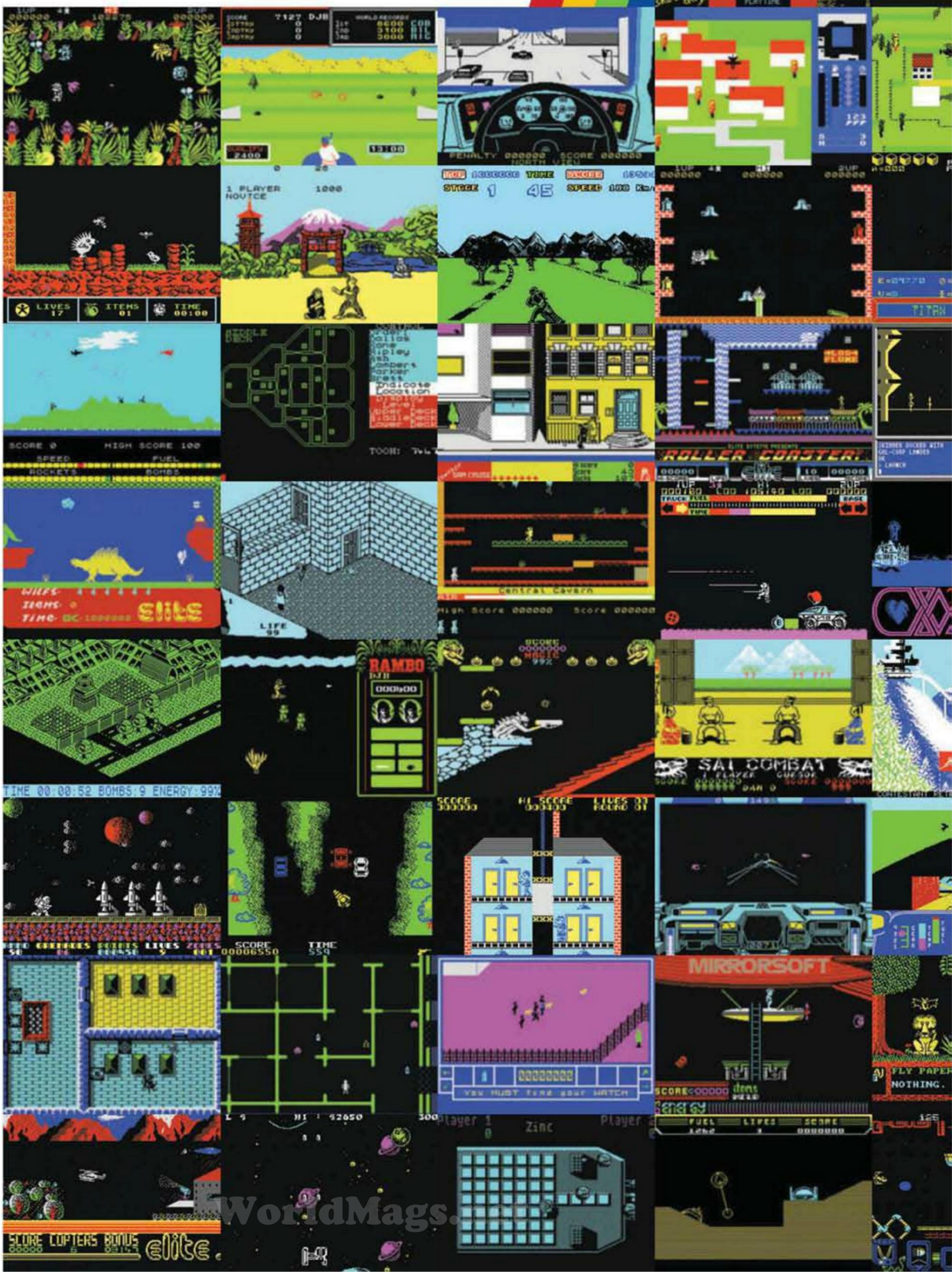
JET SET WILLY



ELITE







sinclair

ZX Spectrum and the rest...

With over 12,000 Spectrum games in existence, its importance as the genesis of modern videogaming cannot be overstated, and many of today's most successful developers cut their teeth on Sir Clive's finest.

01 MATCHPOINT
02 GREEN BERET
03 MAX HEADROOM
04 KNIGHT LORE
05 STOP THE EXPRESS
06 HIGHLANDER
07 STAR WARS
08 BARRY MCGUIGAN WORLD BOXING
09 DUNGEON ADVENTURE
10 LORDS OF MIDNIGHT
11 SKOOL DAZE
12 DUN DARACH
13 TAPPER
14 ROBIN 'O' THE WOOD
15 THE HOBBIT
16 CHUCKIE EGG
17 KNIGHT RIDER
18 SABRE WULF
19 HYPERSPORTS
20 TURBO ESPRIT
21 TLL
22 CYCLONE
23 TRAPDOOR
24 YIE AR KUNG FU
25 STARION
26 THEATRE EUROPE
27 COMMANDO
28 SPIKEY HAROLD
29 WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
30 ENDURORACER
31 PSSST
32 CODENAME MAT
33 FEUD
34 3D DEATHCHASE
35 C5 CLIVE
36 GUNFRIGHT
37 THE SENTINEL
38 HARRIER ATTACK
39 ALIEN
40 CONTACT SAM CRUISE
41 ROLLERCOASTER
42 TAU CETI
43 MERCENARY: ESCAPE FROM TARG
44 CYBERNOID
45 TECHNICIAN TED
46 DAN DARE
47 KNIGHT TYME
48 KOKOTONI WILF
49 FAIRLIGHT
50 MANIC MINER
51 LUNAR JETMAN
52 THANATOS
53 WEST BANK
54 TRASHMAN
55 CHAOS
56 UNDERWURLDE
57 MIAMI VICE
58 GLIDER RIDER
59 RAMBO
60 CAULDRON II
61 SAI COMBAT
62 WINTER GAMES
63 INFILTRATOR
64 SABOTEUR
65 WHERE TIME STOOD STILL
66 BUBBLE BOBBLE
67 RENEGADE
68 EXOLON
69 SPY HUNTER
70 ELEVATOR ACTION
71 STARGLIDER
72 CHEQUERED FLAG
73 WHEELIE
74 AMAUROTE
75 DEATHSTAR INTERCEPTOR
76 JACK THE NIPPER
77 COBRA
78 RANARAMA
79 HALLS OF THE THINGS
80 ALL OR NOTHING
81 DYNAMITE DAN II
82 THREE WEEKS IN PARADISE
83 DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON
84 BOBBY BEARING
85 JETPAC
86 ALIEN8
87 TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY
88 AIRWOLF
89 LIGHTFORCE
90 URIDIUM
91 THRUST
92 ZYNAPS
93 BATMAN
94 MATCHDAY
95 I OF THE MASK
96 STARSTRIKE II
97 BARBARIAN



HIGHLANDER
SHOOT FIREBALLS
Welcome to Dungeon Adventure, the last of the Jewels of Darkness, from Level 9 Computing.
You go east.
You are in the trolls clearing
OPEN DOOR
EAST
SPELL BOOK
WANTED
BUFFALO BILL
DEAD OR ALIVE
BOUNTY
$000250
DAN IS NOW IN SECTOR I
STARSHIP USS PISCES
LOCATION : BRIGHTSTAR
KNIGHT-TYME
The Factory Gates
Montague Road
GOLDEN DRAGON
NAUGHTYOMETER
SCORE 0002920 QUALIFY 013.50s
BARBARIAN

NOW SHOWING!

THE MAKING OF...

IT CAME FROM THE DESERT





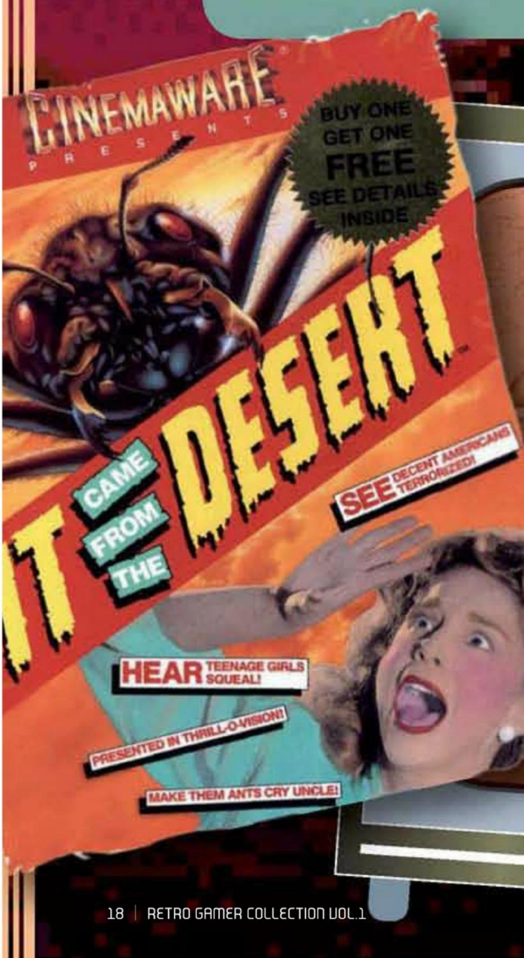
My coffee sat on the counter, cold as the looks I was getting from the locals. He took the chair beside me. The lines on his forehead told me he knew somethin'. Somethin' big.

"You got some questions for me boy?" His voice was dry as the air.

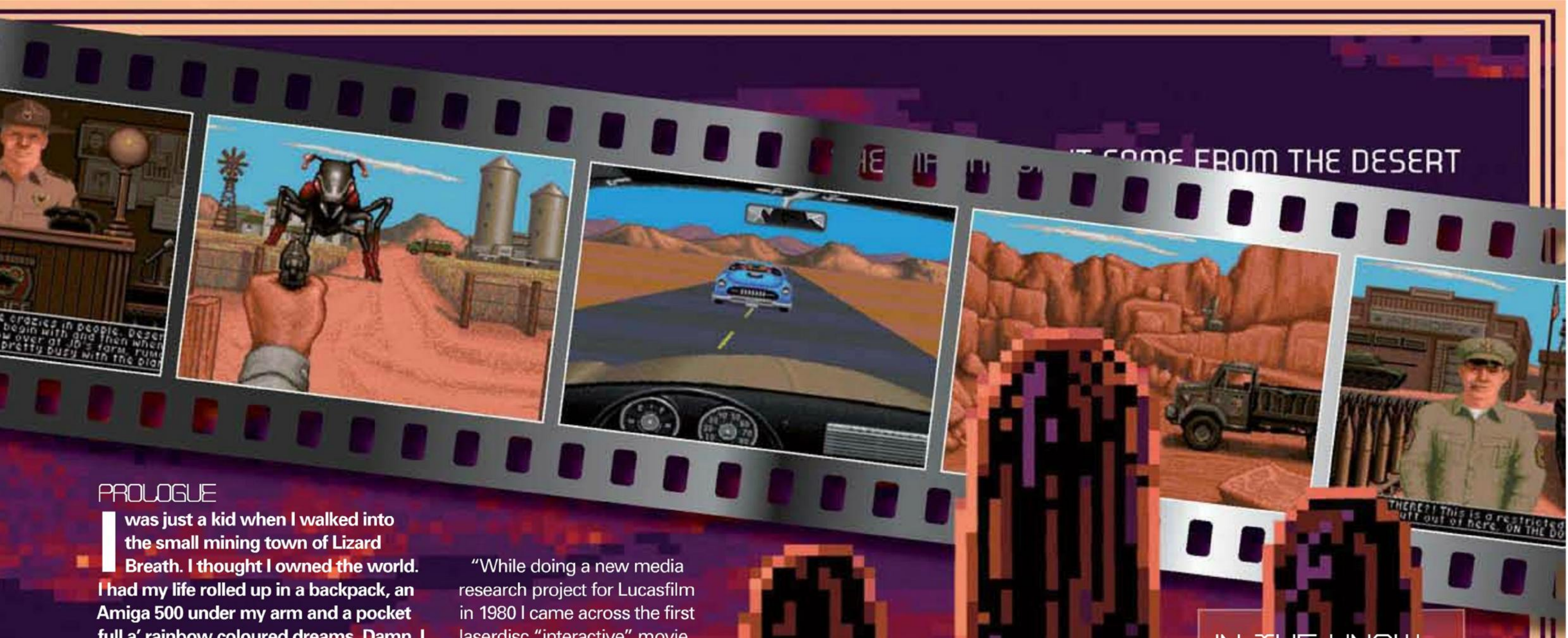
"Maybe. Who's askin'?"

"Name's Riordan. David Riordan. And I know all about the ants."

That got my attention.







PROLOGUE

I was just a kid when I walked into the small mining town of Lizard Breath. I thought I owned the world. I had my life rolled up in a backpack, an Amiga 500 under my arm and a pocket full a' rainbow coloured dreams. Damn, I was naive. But that's how these stories always begin, right? Some guy with a big idea, and some damn fool who believes him.

CHAPTER ONE: "THEM AND US"

"Bob Jacob's concept of Cinemaware was brilliant. What better way to make interesting games than to do interactive versions of great movies like *Robin Hood*, *Samurai* and the big bug films?"

"While doing a new media research project for Lucasfilm in 1980 I came across the first laserdisc "interactive" movie at MIT and was smitten by the concept of interactive narratives. A bunch of us worked for Atari on laserdisc games for about three years before Atari crashed and burned. A friend showed me *Defender Of The Crown* on the Amiga and I wrote Bob a fan letter. He thought it was odd that I had experience in both linear entertainment and interactive gaming. There weren't many of us with such credentials in those days. We talked and I ended up becoming one of the early employees at Cinemaware."

"GROWING UP I'D BEEN FASCINATED BY THE PULP SCI-FI CREATURE FILMS THAT BEGAN WITH THE CLASSIC FIFTIES FILM 'THEM'" DAVID RIORDAN

The tall drink a' scotch in front of me was David Riordan. Some hotshot software guy out of LA who used to work in the movies. You know the kind. Takes the California sun with him, wherever he goes. Well, I'd brought my sunglasses and I liked to listen as much as he liked to talk. I needed answers and this was the kinda guy who loved to give 'em. I asked him where he came from and where he was headed.

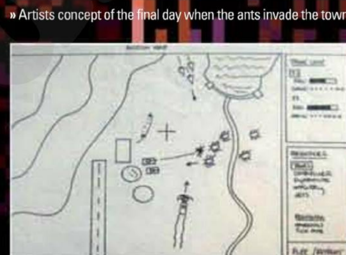
Cinemaware, huh? I'd heard of those guys. Big players in the software racket. Back in the old days I used to run with the Amiga gang and Cinemaware owned that town. There were others, sure, but no one messed with Bob Jacob's boys.



» 'A storyboard showing an early concept for the aerial view mini-game



» Artists concept of the final day when the ants invade the town

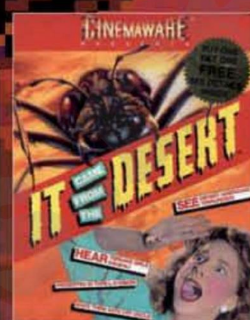


» Designs for the tactical battles between the army (once the player's convinced them to help out), and the advancing hive

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** CINEMAWARE
» **DEVELOPED BY:** DAVID RIORDAN
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **GENRE:** INTERACTIVE MOVIE ACTION ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** FREE



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROCKET RANGER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST, C64, DOS, NES
YEAR: 1988

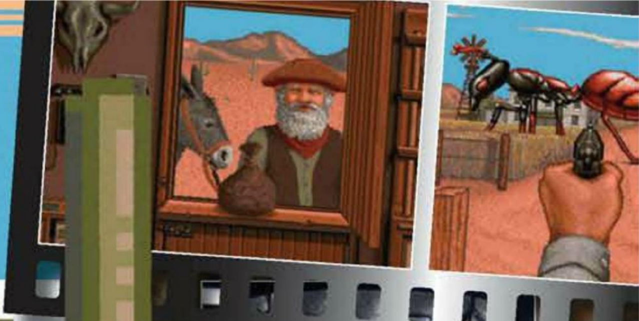
LORDS OF THE RISING SUN
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS
YEAR: 1988

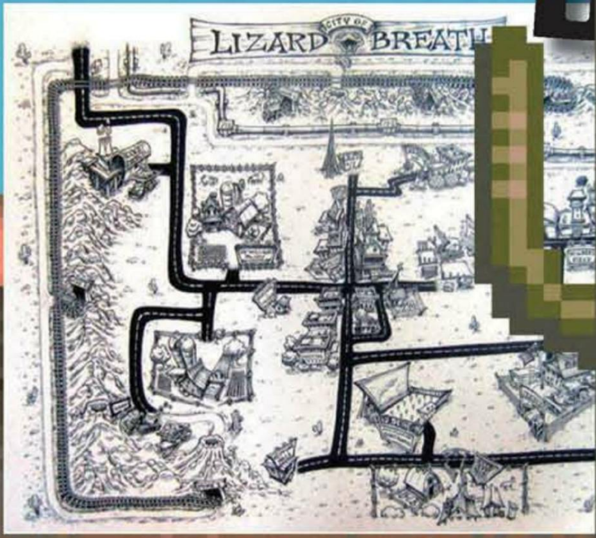
DEFENDER OF THE CROWN
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, C64, DOS, GAME BOY ADVANCE, MAC, NES, PC
YEAR: 1986





IT CAME FROM THE DESERT





» The final art designs for the infested mining town of Lizard Breath



» Artists concept of O'Riordan's bar interior.

THEM AGAIN!

"AntHeads was one of the eight other scenarios we couldn't include in the original *Desert*. When everyone reacted so positively to the first game, we started thinking about a sequel and Randy came up with this idea of using the original environment but layering in a new story. The technical crew figured out how to do it so players could buy a single disk upgrade to the original game. *AntHeads* took *Desert* to the next logical step. I loved the concept that people would turn into zombie-like creatures that would help the ants take over. *AntHeads* won a bunch of game of the year honours. I don't think it was necessarily better; it just built on the appeal of the original in a way the audience really liked. It was almost like the original *Desert* and *AntHeads* were one game, released in a serial fashion."
– David Riordan.







» It takes some sharp shooting to bring down a giant ant. Go for the antennae!



"GIMME YOUR BEST SHOT, LIZARD BREATH. I CAN TAKE IT"

That's the way it was. You accepted it, or you got the hell outta' town.

But it didn't add up. What was some high roller from Cinemaware doin' in a place like Lizard Breath? This guy should be livin' the high life in a downtown condo with a dame for every day 'a the week, not shootin' the gab with a journo on the skids. I poured him another bourbon to oil his chiselled jaw, even though it didn't need oilin'.

"In my first meeting with Bob he asked me what interactive movie I wanted to make. I'd been thinking about creature films so I just said "big bugs." It was the one story he hadn't thought of and he hired me as a result. Growing up I'd been fascinated by the pulp sci-fi creature films that began with the classic Fifties film *Them*. I loved the pulp fiction, the bad special effects and the beautiful screaming girls. When I began to think about what kind of stories would lend themselves to interactive narratives, big ants attacking a small town seemed like such a natural fit. It was fun and campy at the same time. You didn't have to explain too much about what to do. You either stopped the ants or you got eaten."

And there it was, eyeballin' me right in the face. The answers to what'd been goin' on in this backwater town: the answers I could see eatin' away at the locals who'd been avoidin' me. You might think they was unfriendly, but that's too simple. It was fear that kept them quiet, and I knew all about that.

I was warmin' to the guy, so I asked Riordan how he got started – how this town wound up the way it was. Besides – who ain't unfriendly these days?

CHAPTER TWO: "THIS TOWN AIN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR THE BOTH OF US"

"Because of my training in linear storytelling and television production I tackled *Desert* like a movie first and then defined what the gaming elements would be. I needed to 'live' in the story a bit before I could figure out what would make it a fun action-adventure game.

I wrote an initial document that described the town, some of the characters and potential gaming situations. I had crude storyboards created to give a feel of what I was thinking about and then very early on I got screenwriter Ken Melville involved and we began fleshing out all the characters just like we were creating a story bible for a film. It was Ken who gave Lizard Breath and its inhabitants their dramatic flavour and pulp colour."



» Storyboard for the scenes inside the local radio station, KBUG Radio

So I was in Melville's imagination, huh? Figures.

So who's this new guy? What's his connection to the ants? It was getting late and Riordan was ready to walk. I decided to take the grand tour. I had all night, and my ulcer wasn't goin' nowhere. Gimme your best shot, Lizard Breath. I can take it.

"Once Ken and I had an initial story, characters and locations in mind, the lead programmer Randy Platt and I entered into new territory. Designing games for the Amiga platform was very different from laserdisc games where we used very sophisticated video frame jumping techniques in a layered branching matrix to create choices for the players. In Amiga world you could be anywhere at any point in the timeline. This presented story and gameplay opportunities and challenges."

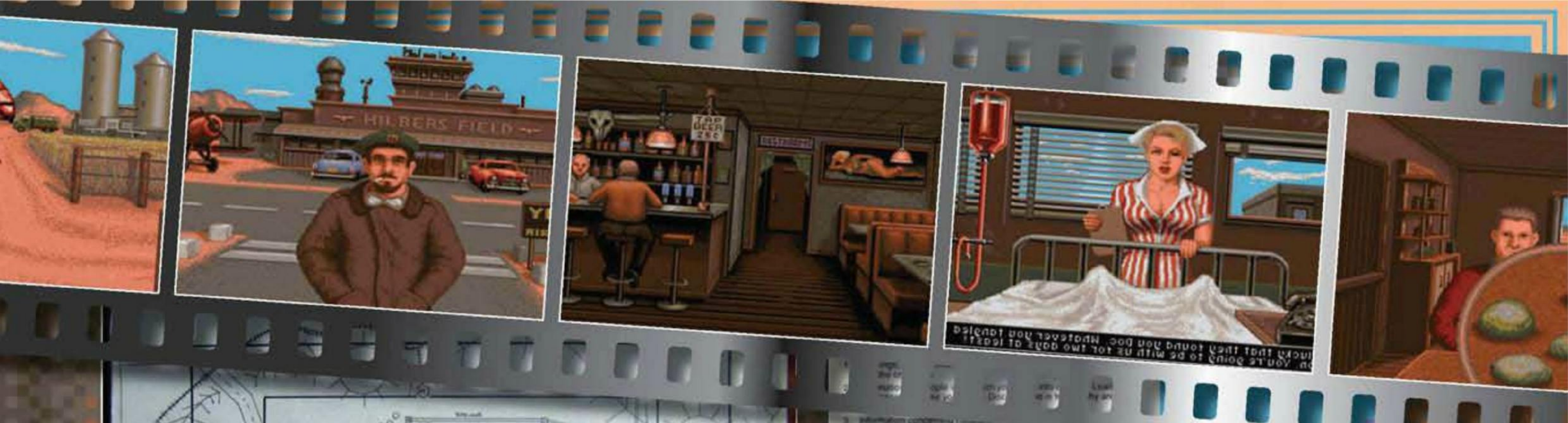
That's a whole lotta fancy words, college boy. But I guess he could tell I used to ride with the Amiga mob. Did he know I was one of those kids who queued up to buy his games, or was he just tryin' to keep me around?

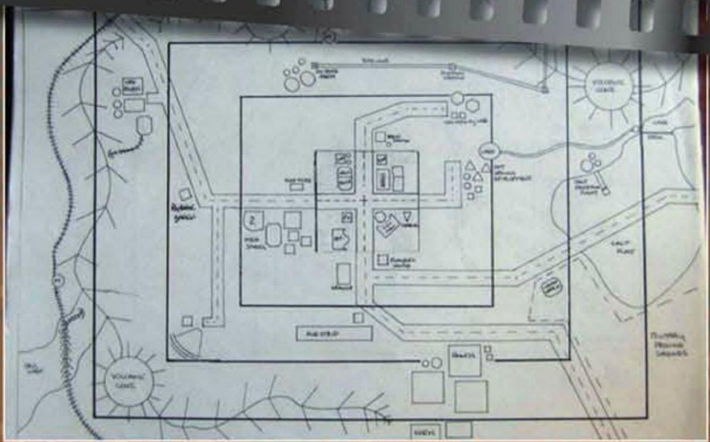
I didn't much care. I needed to know why I couldn't get this damn town outta my mind, no matter how much bad whisky I poured over it.

"I knew I wanted to experiment with a "real time" environment where, like real life, the player couldn't be in all places at once. It made sense to me that the "impending" doom of big bugs headed towards town was time sensitive. This added to the tension. If the player did nothing or goofed around, the town was overrun. They also needed to pay attention to the clues and outcomes of dramatic situations if they wanted to be in the right place at the right time to stop the ants. It seemed to Ken and I like a good way to make the story elements matter to the gameplay instead of just ending up as window dressing for the game sequences."

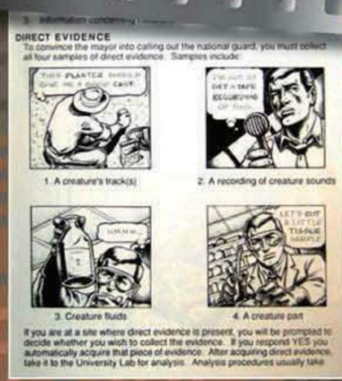
I could tell he was a smart guy, but then again, so could he. He had my ear, and I wasn't in any hurry to get it back.

"I sat down with a map I had made of Lizard Breath on paper and literally

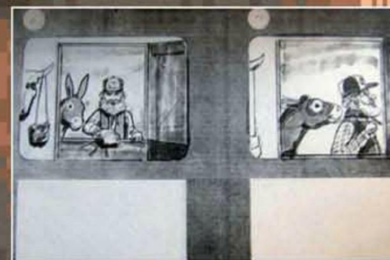




» David's original time-sensitive concept shows how the ants will advance as the days pass in the game



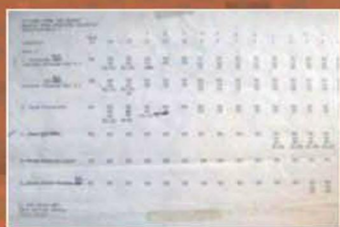
» Even the manual laid out the game's story as if it were a film production



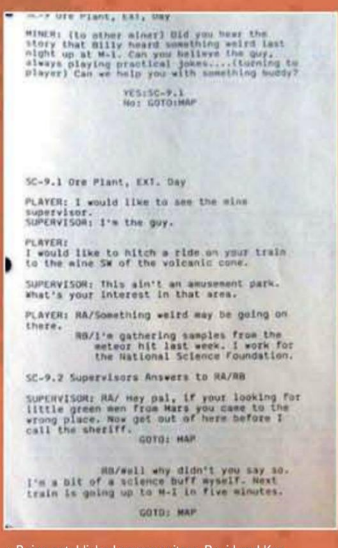
» David proved storyboarding is a valuable tool in creating games

measured 15 steps from where the ants spawned at the edge of town until they arrived at the town centre. These steps became days in our time matrix. Once the player had used up a day of time, what happened at any one of the 30 locations changed to the next day. If the player wasted time running from one side of town to the other, the ants moved that much faster towards their objective. Of course, my calculations were all very crude, but Randy made it all work in terms of programming."

So now there's a programmer on my heels, too? Makes sense. Cinemaware wasn't like the small time software houses with one cat making games on his lonesome. It was organised, smart.



» A design matrix used to determine the ants movements and actions at various locations on a specific day in the game.



```
...-? Ore Plant, Ext, Day
MINER: (to other miner) Did you hear the
story that Billy heard something weird last
night up at M-1. Can you believe the guy,
always playing practical jokes....(turning to
player) Can we help you with something buddy?
            YES:SC-9.1
            No: GOTO:MAP

SC-9.1 Ore Plant, EXT. Day
PLAYER: I would like to see the mine
supervisor.
SUPERVISOR: I'm the guy.
PLAYER:
I would like to hitch a ride on your train
to the mine SW of the volcanic cone.
SUPERVISOR: This ain't an amusement park.
What's your interest in that area.
PLAYER: RA/Something weird may be going on
there.
        RB/I'm gathering samples from the
        meteor hit last week. I work for
        the National Science Foundation.
SC-9.2 Supervisors Answers to RA/RB
SUPERVISOR: RA/ Hey pal, if your looking for
little green men from Mars you came to the
wrong place. Now get out of here before I
call the sheriff.
            GOTO: MAP

        RB/Well why didn't you say so.
I'm a bit of a science buff myself. Next
train is going up to M-I in five minutes.
            GOTO: MAP
```

» Being established screenwriters, David and Ken approached Cinemaware games as if they were writing for... well, the cinema!

Every one 'a Bob's boys had a role to play, and I knew I was gonna meet the whole gang.

CHAPTER THREE "UPPING THE ANT-E"

"Richard Levine developed interactive tools in consultation with Randy and me. They were critical to us managing the unbelievable amount of potential permeations. The design of *Desert* was divided up into the location/day matrix that designated what the player would encounter at that spot at any point in time. There were a number of options.

A character could tell you something.

You could find a piece of evidence.

An ant could attack you.

One of six dramatic situation-based mini-game sequences could be launched.

You could be looking at empty desert.

The tool that Richard developed allowed me to input text, character codes, mini-game triggers, background art plates etc. You didn't need to be a programmer to use it. This was revolutionary at the time. Creative types now had some control over the editing process."

Like I said; smart and organised and kinda like a certain type of insect I can think of.

I was there when these cats used to run the software streets, and I remember the way Jacob's posse looked. Man, they were sharp as a high-class hooker's stiletto, and twice as exclusive. It didn't take much to get him talkin' about Cinemaware's style and I was all over each word like a cheap suit.

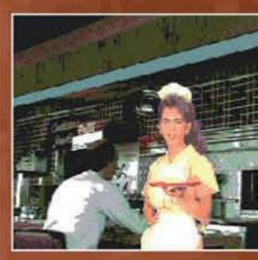


» Hello boys! The famous Cinemaware Cleavage that greets the player after he's been mauled by the ants

"I REMEMBER THE WAY JACOB'S POSSE LOOKED. MAN, THEY WERE SHARP AS A HIGH CLASS HOOKER'S STILETTO, AND TWICE AS EXCLUSIVE"

INTERACTIVE INSECTS

"With the advent of CD-ROM technology, the world of interactive movie-making changed a lot. It made sense for us to think about the third instalment of *Desert* for the TurboGrafx 16. We decided to take a shot at using real actors filmed against blue screen technology and composited with background photographic plates shot in the real desert. Ken and I were in seventh heaven. We were back in the world of actors, voice performances and real music. We had a great time casting the players and I directed for the first time, which was also a gas. Unfortunately, we had to use so much of the TurboGrafx's capabilities for the video sequences, it didn't leave much for gameplay and *Desert III* became more of a demonstration piece. What we learned set the stage for our next evolutionary leap in interactive movie making, however. A whole new generation of interactive movies that our team created like "*Voyeur*" and "*Thunder In Paradise*" were built on what we learned from *Desert III*."
– David Riordan



THE MAKING OF... IT CAME FROM THE DESERT



BIG ANTS, MINI GAMES

"All the mini-games were also dramatically based on story elements in the town of Lizard Breath. They included a Fifties knife fight with some punks, the classic Fifties game of chicken in hot rods, you could rent a biplane and scout for ants and there was a fire-fighting game when the ants got too frisky and tipped something over. One of people's favourites was the hospital game. The player could choose to stay in bed for the allotted time or try to escape and not pay the time penalty. The hospital game was an afterthought when we realised that players loved to get mauled by the ants. It also gave us a chance to throw in the buxom nurse (the infamous Cinemaware cleavage as it was called) that was so typical of Fifties horror films!"
– David Riordan







» Making a break from the hospital saves valuable time, but it's one of the hardest aspects of *Desert*



» This is the Grand Seahorse of the Neptune Society. I think I saw him in *The Da Vinci Code*.

"The last creative step was the visuals. Jeff Hilbers and Jeff Godfrey were the artists that developed the look and feel of *Desert*. They took Ken's characters and gave them a visual life that I still find fresh and fun today. They captured the pulp cartoon feel that made it all work. That was quite a feat. In those days we were lucky if we could get a few frames of animation at any point in time."

I stopped outside the Mayor's office to bum a smoke off the flatfoot. He threw a book of matches at me and hit his beat. The book was empty, so then and there I quit smoking. You can't have everything.

four attack paths and some mini-games." In some ways that saved us. Variations are great, but as it turned out, *Desert* had plenty of gameplay and variety with what we could do on the Amiga at the time. It still required three floppy discs. That was a first."

The streets were empty, but this wasn't the kind a' town where you felt alone. Not with all the skeletons peekin' outta these closets. I pointed across the street to the only place with light seeping from its windows. A bar.

Well, ain't this a turn up for the goddamn books?

"Oh, you noticed O'Riordan's bar? My original family name from County Cork. Actually, all the locations in Lizard Breath were named after people that worked on the game. We let people choose their own poison. So you have Melville Hospital, Hibler's field, Jacob Mining, Cooks Stud Farm, Platt Lab. etc.

was in the big bug films. Half the fun was trying to get the town's people to listen to the hero when he warned them something strange was afoot. How many times have we seen a minor character in a big bug film scoff at the idea of danger, only to be eaten before he can finish his sentence? We loved the black humour of those moments. The player in *Desert* needed help to ultimately be successful and the level of help he would receive was completely based on what he discovered."

CHAPTER FOUR: "THE END?"

No one in Lizard Breath's forgotten about the ants, and they sure as hell ain't tryin' to get rid of 'em. The bugs are part of their lives, just like they're part of mine, and every other naive kid who strolled into Lizard Breath with an Amiga under his arm. In a lotta ways, I'd kinda like to see 'em again, one last time – reassure

> "IF WE WERE GOING TO TACKLE A FOURTH EDITION OF DESERT, WE WOULD PUT THE AUDIENCE RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ACTION IN LIZARD BREATH"
> DAVID RIORDAN

I thought about Riordan's gang and how much they'd shoehorned into this small town. Seems to me like this guy had everything and I wanted to know where he got it. Some folks got the knack for getting what they want. Was he one of 'em?

"Bob [Jacob] wanted Cinemaware games to be more like movies that you would play more than once. This led me to think up lots of variables that would use the same basic environment but offer subtle differences depending on what the player accomplished. My original plan for *Desert* was massive. What did I know? I just figured it would be cool to have nine different kinds of creatures, lots of attack plans and a massive amount of characters and dramatic situations. I still have the polite memo I received from Randy, which said, "You can have one type of creature,

The KBUG radio station was a natural as well."

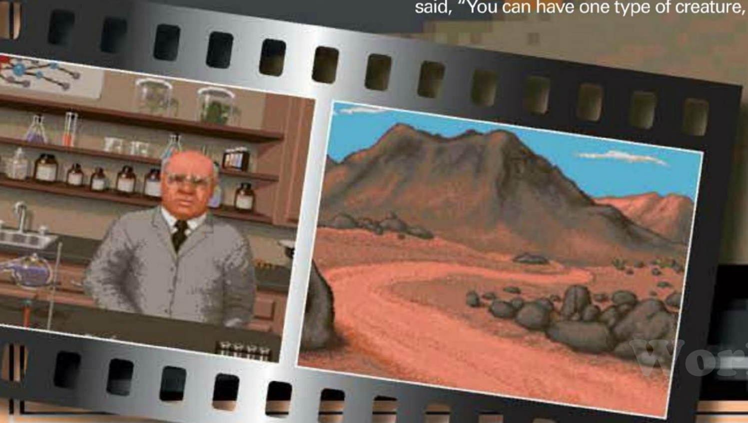
That explains why I'm tailing some hot shot LA suit around the back streets of Hicksville USA, and how come he knows so much about what this place is hiding. The guy's a local, and once you've spent a bit a' time in Lizard Breath, it's hard to leave. I'm startin' to get that.

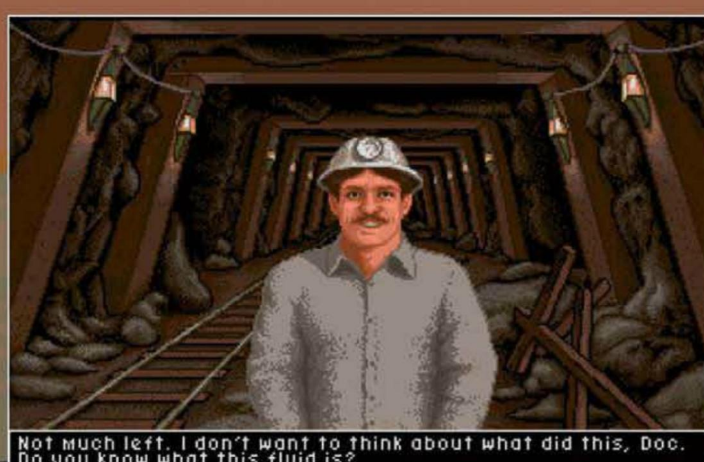
"In *Desert*, what was happening out in the hinterland was a total mystery at the beginning of the piece, just as it

myself that I ain't as crazy as my shrink thinks I am.

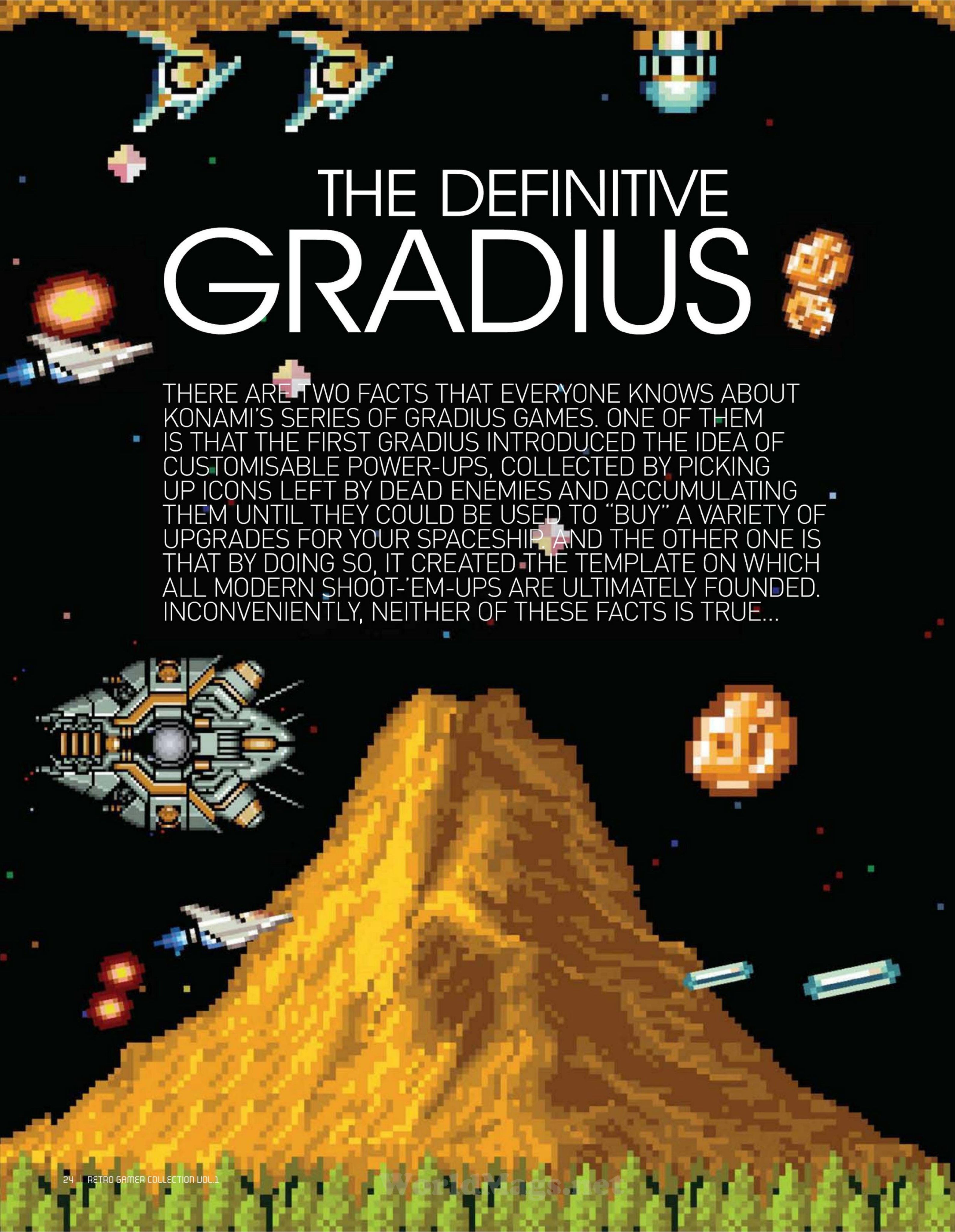
"If we were going to tackle a fourth edition of *Desert*, we'd use new game design tools and interactive strategies to put the audience right in the middle of the action. They wouldn't know if what they were experiencing was real or not. As I write this, an ant has appeared on my desk. A foretelling of things to come? Only the Ant-mind knows for sure."

THE END





» The ant's nest is inside one of the mineshafts, but the miners won't just let you wander in and out without evidence



THE DEFINITIVE GRADIUS

THERE ARE TWO FACTS THAT EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT KONAMI'S SERIES OF GRADIUS GAMES. ONE OF THEM IS THAT THE FIRST GRADIUS INTRODUCED THE IDEA OF CUSTOMISABLE POWER-UPS, COLLECTED BY PICKING UP ICONS LEFT BY DEAD ENEMIES AND ACCUMULATING THEM UNTIL THEY COULD BE USED TO "BUY" A VARIETY OF UPGRADES FOR YOUR SPACESHIP. AND THE OTHER ONE IS THAT BY DOING SO, IT CREATED THE TEMPLATE ON WHICH ALL MODERN SHOOT-'EM-UPS ARE ULTIMATELY FOUNDED. INCONVENIENTLY, NEITHER OF THESE FACTS IS TRUE...

The weird thing about *Gradius* is that it wasn't nearly as influential as people think. The collecting-credits power-up system that was its ground-breaking innovation hasn't, actually, been copied by that many other games apart from other *Gradius* games. Don't believe us? Then how many can you name? There were a couple on the Amiga (Team 17's ill-thought-out *Project X* and Kaiko's glorious *Apidya*, ironically later re-released by Team 17), and if you really, really stretched the point you could just about, maybe, make a case that the *Aleste* series sort of copied the mechanic slightly a little bit. Beyond that, though, it's hard to think of any games not made by Konami that took on the *Gradius* method of upgrading your spaceship – most preferring the direct "pick it up and there it is" weapon-adding style of *R-Type*.

The second weird thing is that this supposedly genre-defining feature wasn't even present in the first game in the *Gradius* line. According to the intro sequence of the GBA's *Gradius* game (*Gradius Advance*, or *Generation*, or *Galaxies*, depending on where you bought it); the first game in the *Gradius* series was actually the 1981 arcade release, *Scramble*, a game with no power-ups in it at all.

Oh man. So we're just two paragraphs in and both of the things everyone thought they knew about *Gradius* turn out to be totally wrong. We're spoiling everything! Luckily, though, there are lots of things about the *Gradius* series that you probably *don't* know, and which *are* true. Which is where we come in, because here at Retro Gamer we're tired of seeing people talk ill-informed nonsense about old games. After all, any idiot can copy down a load of rubbish off the internet, but we're here to set out the definitive truth for you once and for all.

The truth of the matter is that *Gradius* and its many sequels (as we're about to find out, the most recent *Gradius V* would more properly be titled *Gradius XII* or even *Gradius XV*, depending on how you look at it) deserve to be remembered for more than a couple of lazy myths. Although the series as a whole is wildly uneven (particularly in the case of some insanely difficult Japan-only releases), it does contain several of the finest examples of the horizontally scrolling shooter genre ever created (including almost certainly the best one of all time), and as well as definitively listing the entire *Gradius* family line, this feature's here to sift out the gold from the sediment for you: the lovely readers of Retro Gamer. Because you're worth it.

1981
SCRAMBLE

It's a little contentious to include this one but according to Konami it's part of the canon, so let's take its word for it – *Gradius Zero*, if you will. (And we'll just draw a Stalinist veil over *Scramble*'s own arcade sequel, *Super Cobra*...) A major coin-op hit in its day, *Scramble* does indeed contain a number of elements that could, with hindsight, be seen as *Gradius* blueprints – the distinctly different kinds of landscape within the game (most shoot-'em-ups, if you think about it, don't even have land), the combination of airborne enemies and ground attack and the "maze" section of the final stage, which has clear parallels in most of the *Gradius* games. More importantly, it's still a brilliant game and, after being inexplicably overlooked for home ports in its own time (the only official one, bizarrely, was for the Vectrex), it was eventually converted to several formats including the GBA and PSone.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Konami Arcade Advanced (GBA)



» The wonderful *Scramble* remains a thing of beauty and, according to Konami, is where the *Gradius* franchise originated



1985
GRADIUS AKA NEMESIS

It's a shame that the Japanese name became the worldwide choice for the series – "*Nemesis*" is a much punchier title, and actually means something; although it's possible that "*Gradius*" was a corruption of the name of the famous Roman sword the gladius, given that "l" and "r" are the same letter in Japan. Anyway, the first game in the series proper did away with *Scramble*'s fuel gauge, brought in the iconic power-ups, and the rest is history. It was converted with varying degrees of success to scores of home formats, some of the ports being barely recognisable as the same game but the PC Engine hosted the definitive version.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Gradius Collection (PSP)



» Yes the plot is ludicrous, but we'll forgive Konami, because *Nemesis 2* is just so damn good. Reach Level Zero and you may even earn our respect. Maybe…

1987
NEMESIS 2

No, not "*Gradius 2*". The first official sequel in the *Nemesis*/*Gradius* series was in fact this little-known, completely original title released only for the MSX computer standard. It has a dodgy non-canon plot featuring "Dr Venom" in "Cosmic Year 6666", weapons with extra levels of power and a brilliant structure where you have to play the first seven levels as normal, then go back through them in reverse order to reach "Level Zero", the real final stage. Also, if you fly into dead bosses, you discover bonus levels and weapons. The scrolling is rather jerky – symptomatic of a CPU being pushed to its limits – but this is a superb and inventive game. The final release had one level fewer than the beta version, which is also in circulation nowadays, though you do need to know where to look.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Emulator, with BlueMSX

1988
GRADIUS 2 AKA THE AMBITIONS OF GOFER AKA VULCAN VENTURE

The coin-op sequel was a brutally hard game, but grabbed gamers' attention with a spectacular first level featuring huge fire-dragons flying out from behind a galaxy of blazing suns and with the eye-catching debut of the Ripple Laser (included in four possible power-up configurations players could choose from at the start). There were far fewer home ports this time but, of those there were, the NES version (with some very different levels, including the first) and the PC Engine Turbo Duo CD release (with a whole new secret stage) were particularly noteworthy. In either of those, incidentally, you'll be doing extremely well if you ever see level 3.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Gradius Collection (PSP)



» If you've made it this far, you're either a shoot-'em-up genius or a dirty cheat that steals from the church collection box when you think no one else is looking

1988
NEMESIS 3 – EVE OF DESTRUCTION AKA THE AMBITIONS OF GOFER – EPISODE 2

My head's starting to hurt already. "It is now 6809 Nemesis Year", according to the torturously long and complicated intro sequence, and – well, let's not even try to get it all to make sense, and stick to the game. *Nemesis 3*'s first level resembles the opening stage of *Vulcan Venture* but otherwise this is another all-new MSX-only *Nemesis*. The graphics have decreased in size in order to force yet more detail and performance out of the hardware and the difficulty makes *Gradius 2* look like a walk in the park. Downhill. On rollerskates. If you so much as glimpse level 2 of this one, viewers, I'll give you the money myself.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Emulator, with BlueMSX



» *Nemesis 3* not only pushed the MSX to its limits, it also turned out to be one of the toughest games in the series. There's a crisp £10 waiting for whoever completes it

1989
GRADIUS 3 DENSETSU (TRANS: "FROM THE LEGEND COMES THE MYTH")

The uncompromising savagery of arcade *Gradius 2* frightened off a lot of *Gradius* fans so Konami rushed out another sequel just a year later, with a slightly more manageable difficulty level. Apart from that, the main innovations of the third *Gradius* were the inclusion of an ill-judged into-the-screen 3D level – a feature that was subsequently and wisely abandoned as suddenly as it was introduced – and the much more successful Edit Mode, which enabled players to precisely customise which combination of the games' growing array of power-ups they wanted to have available. An excellent SNES port kept the *Gradius* name alive for a new generation of gamers.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Gradius Collection (PSP), Gradius III+IV (PS2)



» The best addition to *Gradius 3* was undoubtedly its superb Edit Mode. 'Pimp my Vic Viper'? You bet your ass. Although the fact that the difficulty had been tweaked also helped



» Bored of always playing through the same levels? The GB's *Nemesis* allowed you to tackle them any way you fancied. Very handy

1990
NEMESIS

What? Just "*Nemesis*"? Despite lacking any distinguishing subtitle, the Game Boy version of *Nemesis* wasn't a port of the original – only a couple of the five levels (plus secret ones) even vaguely resemble the coin-op game and most of the content is completely new, as is the structure in which you can play the five main stages in any order you like. It's a brilliant little game, however; a masterclass in how to design for (what was at the time) the blurry, faint little mono display, but one which stands up superbly now on the crystal clarity of the GBA or emulator screen.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your GBA/KIGB

1991
GRADIUS – INTERSTELLAR ASSAULT AKA NEMESIS 2 – THE RETURN OF THE HERO

Not confused enough yet? The second Game Boy incarnation, (the first having been called "*Nemesis*" even in Japan) reverted to the twin naming scheme and confusingly pinched the "*Nemesis 2*" name from the first MSX sequel, although at least it got a distinct subtitle. This time the game's five levels were all new, and it's almost as good as its predecessor, with a particularly fine scene-setting opening section. The Japanese and Western releases have different graphics for the end sequences.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your GBA/KIGB





» Okay, we're getting seriously confused now… it's a 1987 game that was remade in 1993, so it looks like a new game and not an older one, yet we've called it *Nemesis 90*, but it's really *Nemesis 2*? Aaargggh!

1993
NEMESIS 90 KAI (TRANS: "REVISED")

Not content with mucking around with words, Konami thought it'd also be a laugh to screw with dates. This game for the Japanese Sharp X68000 computer is actually a reworking of the 1987 MSX *Nemesis 2* with much nicer graphics, a simplified weapons system, and – oh no – the already challenging difficulty cranked up several notches. Hmm… a 1987 game released in 1993? Let's split the difference and call it "*Nemesis 90*", retrospectively changing the name of the game it's based on! Genius! (Interestingly, at around the same time some fans also produced an unofficial "hack" port of *Nemesis 2* to run on the X68000. Extraordinarily professional in quality and more faithful to the MSX game, it's somewhat less daunting than the "legit" version.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: The X68000 emulator XM6

1997
GRADIUS GAIDEN (TRANS: "GRADIUS LEGENDS")

Until its welcome reappearance on the PSP's recent *Gradius Collection*, this was the lost jewel in the *Gradius* crown. Only released in Japan, it's a strikingly beautiful interpretation of some classic *Gradius* themes, with gorgeous, translucent graphics, wonderfully inventive levels (like the "Gradius junkyard" of stage 2), well-judged and much fairer difficulty, and (for the first time in the series) a two-players-at-once option. Until the arrival of *Gradius V*, this was the best of all the *Gradius* games. Watch out for the disturbing giant-swastika boss on level 8 and curse the European and American branches of Sony for frowning on 2D releases like this until almost a decade later.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Gradius Collection (PSP)



» *Gradius Gaiden* was the first game in the series to allow two players to blast up the enemy at once. Now you had someone else to blame if you lost a life. Brilliant!

1998
GRADIUS 4 FUKKATSU (TRANS: "THE REVIVAL")

After the triumph of *Gradius Gaiden*, it was all the more surprising that the bearer of the official "*Gradius IV*" moniker would be such a stinker. Despite accompanying the launch of the new flagship PS2, this is an utter catastrophe of a game, from the stupendously ugly first level all the way through the farrago of hideously unfair memory-test stages that make up the rest of it. The PSP version's quicksave function makes it almost palatable, if only to see the spanky new visual effects later on but in the arcades and on the PS2 this was a complete atrocity.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Gradius Collection (PSP)

PARODIUS ZERO

Even though we haven't covered *Parodius* in this feature, we couldn't help but wonder where the idea for it came from when we stumbled across this. It's "*Gradius Spacial*", a 1987 fan-created mod of the first *Gradius* running on the Sharp X68000 computer, in which the layouts of the levels have been altered and all the sprites except your ship replaced by characters from various Namco games (including *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Dig-Dug* and *Xevious*). It would be three more years before Konami came up with the idea of a "parody *Gradius*" itself.



» In a perfect world we'd have erased *Gradius 4* from history but then this wouldn't be the definitive *Gradius* article. God damn our perfection, god damn it to hell

2001
GRADIUS GENERATION AKA GRADIUS GALAXIES AKA GRADIUS ADVANCE

Fortunately, the escaped mental patients who'd broken into Konami HQ and written *Gradius IV* were recaptured by burly men with butterfly nets, and things got back on track with the thrice-named GBA game. In many ways reminiscent of *Gaiden* (especially visually), and also taking the first player-friendly steps towards the "quicksave" function of the PSP compilation, *Generation* nevertheless dodges any accusations of being over-easy with the inclusion of three insanely brutal Challenge Modes, which pit the player against short sections of the game without power-ups and facing viciously enhanced enemies. The third and final one will make you yearn for the good old days of *Nemesis 3*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your GBA/DS



» If you thought other *Gradius* games were tough, wait until you discover *Generation's* Challenge modes. You won't know what hit you



» *Gradius* on a mobile phone? You better believe it. You can't consider yourself a true *Gradius* fan until you own both of them

2004
GRADIUS NEO
GRADIUS NEO IMPERIAL

For hardcore *Gradius* collectors, these two games are the Holy Grail and the lost treasures of Atlantis combined. Released only in Japan, they're two all-new and original *Gradius* titles that run exclusively on mobile phones. *Neo* is a fairly traditional five-stage *Gradius*, most interesting for including some weapons from the *Parodius* spin-off series. *Neo Imperial*, however, is a radical departure in which you play the part of one of the evil Bacterion boss ships (the one from the end of the original coin-op's first level), and fly in the opposite direction to the norm, from the right-hand-side of the screen to the left. You'll have to jump through some very convoluted hoops if you want to sample the joys of either of these in the West, so good luck with that.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your flight back from Tokyo

2004
GRADIUS V

And finally, for now, we come to what by any logical reckoning is actually the 15th, rather than 5th, completely distinct classic-style *Gradius/Nemesis* game. (See "BYE BYE BLACK SHEEP", though.) After the disaster that was *Gradius IV*, Konami handed over control of the series' second PS2 incarnation to *Treasure*, the celebrated developer famed for, among many other things, the legendary shoot-'em-ups *Radiant Silvergun* and *Ikaruga*. The former Konami employees didn't disappoint, taking the signature elements of *Gradius* but also implementing some dramatic changes – most crucially the ability to retrieve your "Option" ghost ships when you died – to create what for all sane people is the pinnacle of the horizontally-scrolling shooter's art. Visually stunning and punishingly hard, yet in a vastly more fair and accessible way than any other game in the line, *Gradius V* is a masterpiece. It's so hard to imagine it being bettered, in fact, that if there's any honour left in the world of videogaming publishing, Konami will take a leaf out of Irem's book and, as with *R-Type Final*, allow it to stand as the end marker of a series that's now been running for almost a quarter of a century. You just can't follow perfection.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The PS2, duh

» The finest game in the *Gradius* canon and the greatest horizontal shooter ever made bar none. Don't take our word for it though, play it for yourself and weep at Treasure's brilliance



BYE BYE BLACK SHEEP

Particularly alert readers will have noticed some obvious omissions from this so-called, self-styled "definitive" guide to the *Gradius* family – most notably the *Salamander* and *Parodius* series. There are all sorts of plausible reasons for this, not least that if we were to cover every *Gradius-related* thing out there we'd need most of the issue, but mostly it's that these games, like mutated genetic cousins, don't really belong.

- The three *Salamander* games, while officially part of the *Gradius* canon, are actually quite different in several crucial respects, such as the inclusion of vertically scrolling levels and the instant-effect nature of the power-ups (except in the case of *Life Force*, the weird variant of *Salamander* and, frankly, the *Gradius* backstory is already confusing enough without getting into *that*).

- The four *Parodius* titles, on the other hand, do play more or less identically to the *Gradius* games but clearly aren't a part of the same plotline, any more than *Airplane!* is part of the *Airport 7X* series of films that it spoofed.

- The two *Solar Assault* coin-ops just borrow the name and slap a layer of *Gradius*-themed paint onto two games from a totally different genre, the *Starblade*-style first-person 3D space shooter.

- You could, of course, argue that the LCD handheld *Gradius* game, and the Japanese board game, and so on, also counted as "*Gradius* games" and ought to be included. We would fix you with a special hard stare, though, and you'd definitely back down.

- And we're only really interested in completely different games in the series, so except where already noted (if it was particularly interesting or significant) we're not concerning ourselves here with things like changes in home conversions (missing levels, numbers of Options, altered weapons), or oddities like the "*VS*" coin-op release of *Gradius*, running on NES hardware but looking quite different to the ordinary NES version. There's a particularly interesting tale surrounding the Spectrum release, for example (differently titled "*Nemesis: The Final Challenge*"), but that'll just have to wait for another day, because – look! – we've already run out of space. Bye!

R-TYPE

OUR TYPE OF GAME



- **PUBLISHER** IREM
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ PCB BOARD



HISTORY

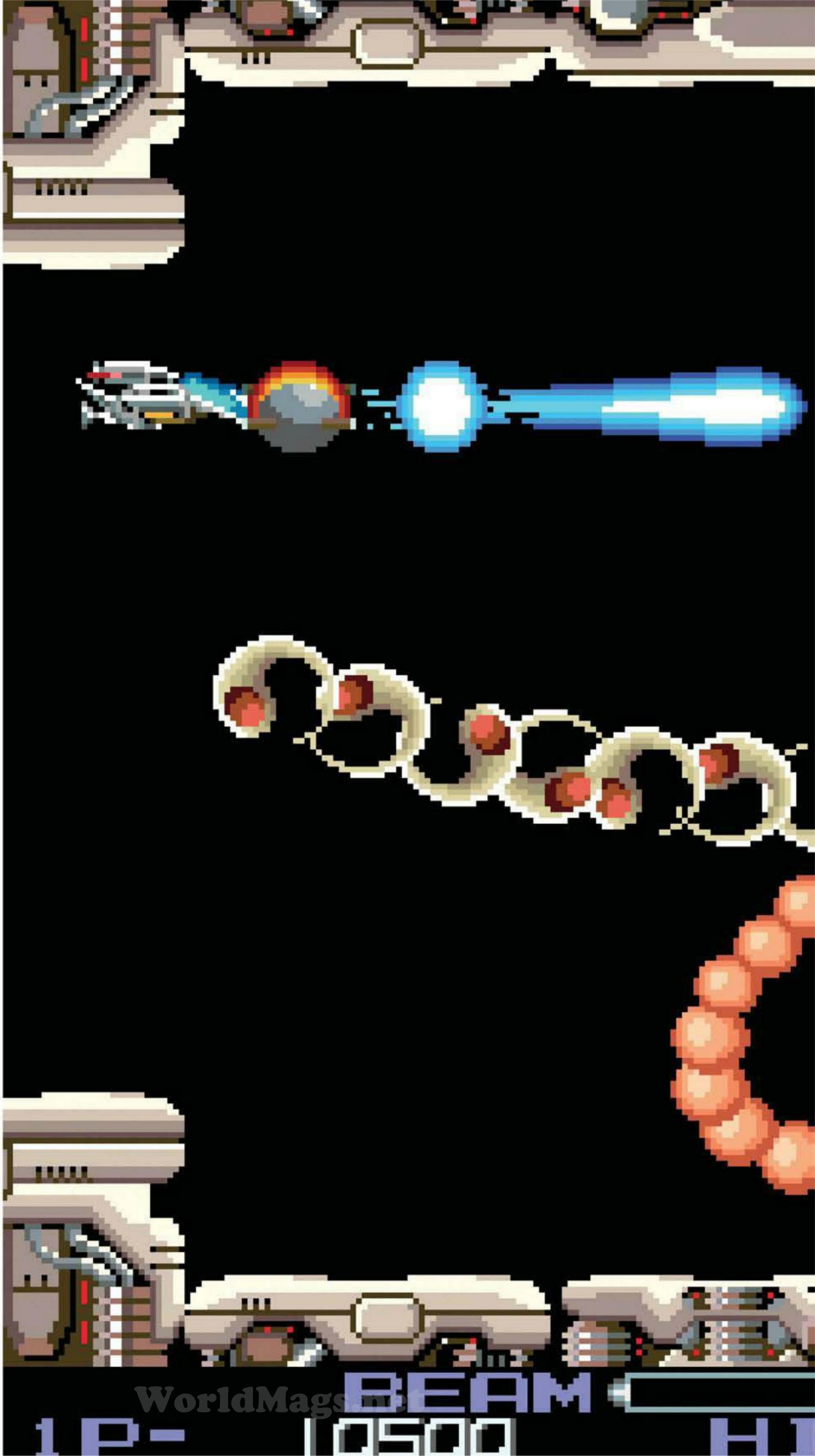
Some games are destined for greatness; others are mere flotsam that are doomed to float downstream into obscurity. *R-Type* is, despite all the odds, the former.

Back in 1987, Irem was barely even a speck of dust in the great pantheon of developers (even in terms of shooters, it wasn't a developer that would escape the lips of even the most ardent shoot-'em-up fan). No, in the golden age, gamers were still loyal to the twitchy controls and fast-paced action of the likes of *1942* or *Gradius*, and it seemed almost incomprehensible that any developer could shake Konami and Capcom's stranglehold on the shooting genre. However, this all changed when *R-Type* was unleashed onto a somewhat unsuspecting public.

Before *R-Type*, the idea was to destroy wave after wave of pixellated foe – here your goal was simple: survive. Though the levels were famously claustrophobic, you did at least have one vital companion: the Force Pod. This little critter could be positioned at the front of your craft, at the back of it, or it could remain detached (encircling you in the hope that it might offer some protection from the raging onslaught). It was especially useful when trying to attack hard to reach Bydo scum. In fact, getting through all of its eight levels was largely down to your ability to manage your Force Pod in the trickiest of situations.

Although it will be remembered for its innovative Force Pod, it was the amazing overall design that will linger longest in the memories of gamers. Not merely the level design itself (although it remains as potent to this day as it is challenging), but the marriage of the organic and the mechanical further added to an already atmospheric and generally oppressive gaming experience.

The truest measure of any game is how it stands up today – and, unlike so many other shooters (and perhaps even its four official sequels), *R-Type's* as playable now and as enjoyable as it ever was.




174500

THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN

MAGIC KNIGHT



THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN MAGIC KNIGHT 1985-1987

WHEN IT COMES TO BUDGET GAME HEROES EVERYONE REMEMBERS DIZZY. BUT CONSIDER THIS: BY THE TIME THE EGG-SHAPED ONE ROLLED ONTO THE SCENE IN 1987, MASTERTRONIC'S MAGIC KNIGHT HAD ALREADY RETIRED FROM THE SCENE HAVING STARRED IN A SUCCESSFUL SERIES OF REASONABLY PRICED ADVENTURE GAMES. MARTYN CARROLL LOOKS BACK AT THE MAGIC KNIGHT QUADRILOGY AND TALKS EXCLUSIVELY TO ITS CREATOR, DAVID JONES



» It was rare for Mastertronic to publicise its games but getting Jones to dress up as Magic Knight was too good an opportunity to miss

You could be forgiven for thinking that David Jones is slightly reticent on the subject of Magic Knight. After all, this is the first time he's spoken publicly about the character in almost 20 years.

The truth, however, is that for most of these years he's been keeping himself rather busy developing console games, first at Psygnosis and then later at Acclaim. He finally left the industry in 2002 and these days he's a semi-retired property landlord and part-time saxophonist in a local blues band. Which means he now has both the time and inclination to reflect on his auspicious early career in gaming and, in particular ,the creation of Magic Knight, one of the most popular characters of the 8-bit era.

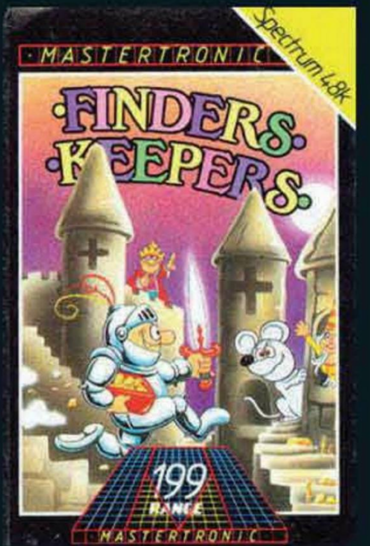
CODE SHOP

Jones was first introduced to programming while on a quantity surveying course in 1979. "I really enjoyed it," he says, "so I bought myself a Video Genie. It was a cheap Tandy TRS-80 clone with a built-in tape deck. I quickly produced my first game in BASIC, using the crude graphics available at the time. I was quite pleased with it, but it was slow. Somebody at my local computer shop suggested that I needed to learn machine code, which I did. At this point it was still all hobby stuff."

That was soon to change though. Having been made redundant a few years later he decided to work for himself and began programming for the Sinclair Spectrum. Rather than spend hours on end prodding the Spectrum's rubber keyboard, he used a custom interface to connect the Speccy's expansion slot to the printer port of his shiny new TRS-80 Model III. "It was convenient because both the Spectrum and the TRS-80 had their ROM in the lower address range so I could assemble code on the TRS-80 and dump it into the same memory addresses on the Spectrum. A few of us used TRS-80s in those days for this reason and also because it had a proper keyboard, decent development software (for the time) and disk support. I had two 180K disk drives and a massive 15MB hard drive, which was the size of a modern PC base unit and cost a mere £2,000!"

With this killer piece of kit in place, Jones soon became well known in his local Tandy

"THERE WERE NO STORYBOARDS OR SCHEDULES OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT. I STARTED WITH A ROUGH IDEA AND MADE THE REST UP AS I WENT ALONG" DAVID JONES



» The cartoon cover was reminiscent of *Ocean's Hunchback* but there was much more to *Finders Keepers* than leaping over battlements



» With its different gameplay elements, *Finders Keepers* was a title that could not easily be pigeonholed

shop. "They had a kind of floating computer club where interested people would swap ideas or bits of code they'd written," he remembers, striking up similarities with Matthew Smith's path into programming. "One day a guy named Albert Owen asked the shop owners if they knew anybody who could write games; he was looking to build a games company and needed programmers. So I met him and started writing stuff."

The company was Procom Software, based in Essex, and Jones's first published game was *Bonkers*, a fast-paced *Frogger* clone for the 16K Spectrum. This promising effort was followed by a couple of programming utilities – Dynamic Graphics and Dynamic Programming. In his heart, however, he was a huge fan of text adventures, particularly those of Scott Adams, but he found it frustrating playing them on the Spectrum's clumsy keyboard. To this end he set about creating an adventure game that could be controlled using a joystick.

A KIND OF MAGIC

With the basic game concept in place and Albert's son Ray on board as the graphics artist, it took Jones just 12 weeks to write the finished game. The result was a graphic adventure that deftly mixed platforming and puzzle elements, with a couple of scrolling maze sections thrown in for good measure. The star of the show was Magic Knight, who was based on a piece of character art that Albert Owen had plucked from a public domain art book. With the knight in shining armour selected and the castle setting, the noble quest (to join the famed 'Polygon Table') naturally followed. "There were no storyboards or schedules or anything like that. I started with a rough idea and made the rest up as I went along." At the time, Procom was struggling to publish its own products so Albert discussed the then unnamed game with a few companies. "It was Mastertronic who saw the potential," says Jones, "although it suggested a few additions as it thought the title could work in its educational range if the objects had a monetary value that could be added up!". So Jones quickly introduced the ability to combine and trade valuable objects for profit.

The only thing the game now lacked was a title. A typically shrewd Mastertronic decided on *Finders Keepers*, simply because there was a madcap comedy film of that name around at the time. "Mastertronic thought it could get some free publicity for this totally unconnected game!"

In hindsight, Mastertronic needn't have bothered with marketing tricks, as *Finders Keepers* was a great game in its own right that went on to become one of the company's bestselling titles. From the £1.99 retail price Jones received a royalty rate of just ten pence per unit, but when you consider that the game sold over 330,000 copies, it wasn't bad money for three months' work! Both parties were extremely chuffed with the results so Magic Knight was buffed up and sent off in search of more treasure.

MAD FOR IT

Following the extraordinary success of *Finders Keepers*, Jones was given complete editorial control over the making of the sequel. "Mastertronic told me: 'You write it and we'll sell it, just let us know when it's almost ready so we can get previews arranged'. So I wrote what I wanted."

Five months later and the game was finished. Entitled *Spellbound*, the sequel was a significant step up from *Finders Keepers*. It featured a larger game map, bigger and better graphics, multiple characters – even more devious puzzles – and an abundance of wit. Crucially, Jones also developed a new on-screen menu system – coined Windimation – that made it much easier to interact with objects and characters. "I saw the Apple Mac interface for about five minutes before rushing off home to knock up a Spectrum version! I quickly realised I could use a windowed menu system to construct text-based commands without having to stop and type. That added a lot of flexibility to the sort of games I could write."



» In *Spellbound* your first job was to locate the Wand of Command, providing you with the power to order other characters about





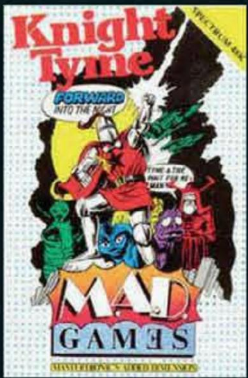
» The Commodore 64 version of *Finders Keepers* in all its glory



» The games that launched Mastertronic's MAD range included *Spellbound, The Last V8, Master Of Magic* and *Hero Of The Golden Talisman*



THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN



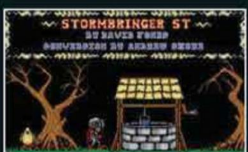
» *Knight Tyme* first appeared on the Spectrum 128k with a scaled-down 48k version appearing a month later

STORMBRINGER ST

In 1988 a version of *Stormbringer* was released for the Atari ST, marking Magic Knight's only appearance on a 16-bit machine. Ported by Andrew Shore, the conversion featured detailed and colourful graphics, as you'd expect, but it didn't exactly push the Atari ST's capabilities.

"It was nice and pretty," says Jones, "but if I'd written it myself I would have added a lot more as the ST could handle all the things the Spectrum couldn't. I'd have had a real-time ongoing update of the status during menu use, significantly better character interaction and way more animation. However, it was a good, faithful port."

The game advertised that ST versions of *Spellbound* and *Knight Tyme* would follow but neither materialised due to less-than-stellar sales of Mastertronic's 16-bit titles.



» *Stormbringer* on the Atari ST was something of a missed opportunity. One for fans of the series only

The sequel was such a giant leap forward that Mastertronic launched the game in October 1985 on its new MAD label. MAD stood for Mastertronic Added Dimension and was reserved for games that were a cut above the usual budget offerings. Despite glowing reviews from the gaming press, *Spellbound* shifted less than half the number of units as *Finders Keepers* but, thanks to the higher price point of £2.99, it was still a considerable success.

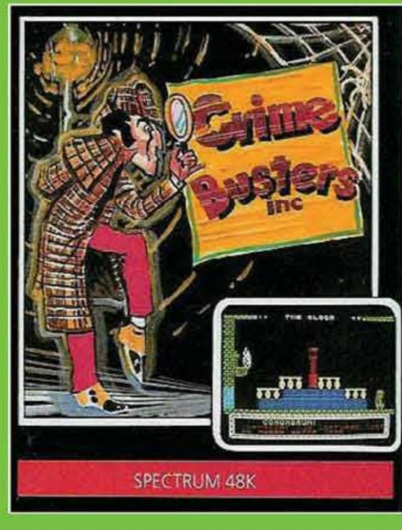
By this time, the two Magic Knight games had been ported to most of the 8-bit platforms. As was the norm at Mastertronic, other programmers carried out the conversions. "I took very little interest in the other versions apart from when the royalty cheques arrived as it was a nice bit of extra money!" he laughs. Besides, he was busy developing the third game in the series, *Knight Tyme*, which was set aboard a space ship in the far-off future.

Knight Tyme was much more than just *Spellbound* in space, however. In a bid to raise the bar further, the game was developed for the newly released 128K Spectrum. Whereas publishers like Ocean and Odin simply released enhanced versions of existing titles, Jones forged ahead with a game built specifically for the new machine.

LIFE OF CRIME

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery then David Jones must have been beaming from ear to ear when IJK software released *Crime Busters*, a carbon copy of *Spellbound* featuring the same puzzles, the same menu system and even the same built-in hacker protection scheme. The situation came to light when IJK sent a review copy to Sinclair User staff writer Jim Douglas, who immediately noticed the similarities between the two games and dobbed IJK in.

Mastertronic's management weren't exactly thrilled by this blatant rip-off and demanded that the game was immediately withdrawn from sale. IJK complied with the order and plagiarising programmer Harry Price had to write a grovelling letter of apology. At least the cheeky scamp had a fine sense of irony, naming the game *Crime Busters*…



» It wouldn't take a Sherlock Holmes to solve this barefaced crime

"It wasn't a commercial decision," he says, "I just wanted to play with the new Spectrum and write a bigger game, then just chop out the bits I liked least to fit it into the 48K version later on."

STORMY KNIGHT

Knight Tyme debuted in May 1986, hot on the heels of *Spellbound*, but it would be a full year before the fourth Magic Knight title, *Stormbringer*, would appear. Jones explains that he slowly began to lose interest once he'd overcome all the technical hurdles: "*Knight Tyme* had significant internal improvements on the game system and I was still interested in developing it then. By the time I got to *Stormbringer*, the system was complete and it was too easy to knock out another game, so I took ages to finish it as I was a bit bored. Plus, the people at Mastertronic had changed and it wasn't as much fun any more. That's what made me decide to retire her when I did." Did you spot that? Retire her? "Magic Knight was always female," he reveals. "If I'd written the fifth game that was going to be the big reveal at the end."

And what about the fifth game? Were there any other surprises in store? "I didn't develop it that much," he answers when pressed. "I was going to move back to ancient times, though and I was intending to shift to the Atari ST as the main platform."

He then springs another shock, saying that he hasn't ruled out Magic Knight's return: "I'd be interested in getting involved with a new series if it could be done with minimal scheduling. I'd need a few good programmers and artists who are up for it and a good chunk of editorial control. I suppose I'd have to plan it all and do an overall game design but I've worked with teams at Psygnosis and Acclaim so I know how it's done these days."

He pauses, thinks back to the "good old days" for a few seconds, then stops and smiles. "Writing games for a living can be great fun."



» Once you are in command of the ship you can visit the nearby Starbase 1 and beam down using the on board 'transporter'

"I SAW THE APPLE MAC INTERFACE FOR ABOUT FIVE MINUTES BEFORE RUSHING OFF HOME TO KNOCK UP A SPECTRUM VERSION! I QUICKLY REALISED I COULD USE A WINDOWED MENU SYSTEM TO CONSTRUCT TEXT-BASED COMMANDS WITHOUT HAVING TO STOP AND TYPE. THAT ADDED A LOT OF FLEXIBILITY TO THE SORT OF GAMES I COULD WRITE" DAVID JONES



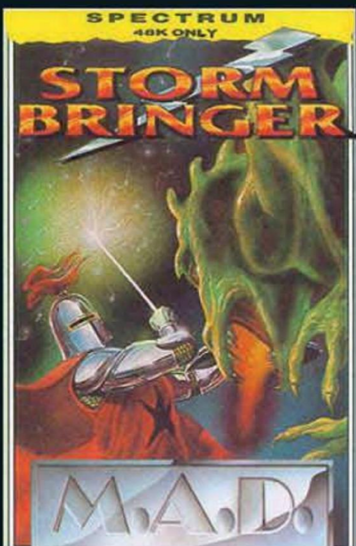
» In one of *Stormbringer*'s more inspired moments, you had to sneak into the castle by wearing a special disguise

MAGIC KNIGHT FAMILY TREE

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN...



BEARWOOLF'S A TEDDY BEAR?
In *Stormbringer* Bearwoolf kills Magic Knight if you attempt to pass, but Robin of Shylock shoots the beast with a silver arrow, turning it into a cuddly teddy bear. The bear then latches onto Magic Knight, crying "Mama! Mama! Teddy is scared!" every time you pick it up.



» *Stormbringer* favoured fantasy cover art over the cartoon style of the earlier games

FINDERS KEEPERS

System: Spectrum/CPC/C64/C16/MSX • **Year Released:** 1985

Finders Keepers is best viewed as a prequel to the 'Windimation' trilogy. The emphasis is on arcade action as the castle is packed with nasties that need to be avoided. The slick maze sections and the trading element lift the game above myriad identikit platformers around at the time and ,while it won't take you long to find all the treasure and escape from the castle, it's worth the price tag. Magic Knight's first adventure deservedly became Mastertronic's third bestselling original game after *Formula 1 Simulator* and *BMX Racers*.

SPELLBOUND

System: Spectrum/CPC/C64/Atari 800 • **Year Released:** 1985

Having escaped from the Castle of Spriteland in *Finders Keepers*, Magic Knight must travel to the Castle of Karn and rescue Gimbal the Wizard. *Spellbound* is a dream sequel; key to its success is the Windimation menu system that lets you quickly enter fairly complex commands. Another addition is the cast of supporting characters, although having to command them to eat, drink and be happy does wear thin after a while. Some of the puzzles are a bit random too, but in the context of 8-bit gaming *Spellbound* is a true graphic adventure.

No.1



No.2



KNIGHT TYME

System: Spectrum/CPC/C64/MSX • **Year Released:** 1986

You begin *Knight Tyme* as a stowaway on a starship who must find a way to return home. The game appears to follow the *Spellbound* formula. It's only after solving the first series of puzzles and taking control of the starship that the game finds its feet – it becomes a thrilling space quest, with you flying between planets, beaming down to look around, garnering clues, while all the time keeping an eye on the ship's fuel gauge. Throw in an enhanced version of Windimation, a save facility and a foot-tapping tune and you've got the best of the Magic Knight games.

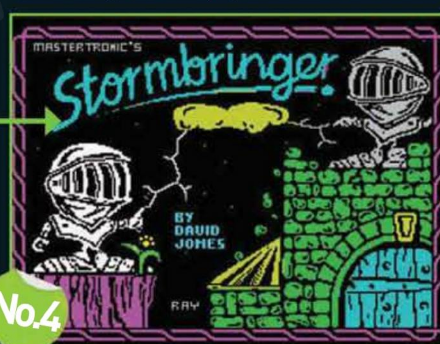
STORMBRINGER

System: Spectrum/CPC/C64/MSX/Atari 800 • **Year Released:** 1987

The final game sees Magic Knight, transported home in a time machine, split into two characters – one good and one bad. You have to track down and merge with your evil counterpart. Looking back, *Stormbringer* is too similar to *Spellbound*, with few of the touches that set *Knight Tyme* apart. However, it does feature a couple of cracking puzzles – one involving levers and binary numbers. Most versions also feature an amazing multi-part theme by David Whittaker that never gets on your nerves. Overall, *Stormbringer* is a satisfying conclusion to the series.



No.3



No.4

PLAY THIS...

IF YOU PLAY ONE MAGIC KNIGHT GAME...



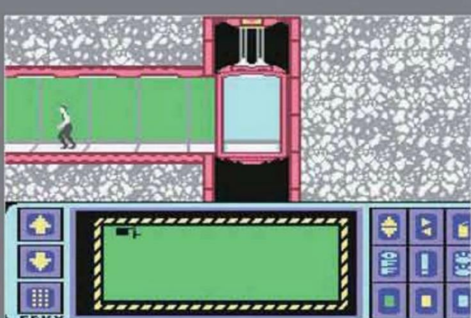
KNIGHT TYME on the spectrum 128K
The third Magic Knight game is a fantastic voyage and the Spectrum 128K release is the best version, with more locations, additional characters and an amazing in-game tune by sound supremo David Whittaker. At just £2.99 it was great value and the first 'proper' game for new Spectrum.

THE MAKING OF…

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

"Another visitor. Stay a while… staaaaay forever!" The haunting tones of Elvin Atombender billow from the speakers at the start of the game, creating the perfect atmosphere for what follows; a program of such perfection and magnitude, it is still talked about, played and defeating gamers more than 20 years after it was released… Mat Allen's mission seems impossible





» This lair will self-destruct in six hours



IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** CBS (US), US GOLD (UK)
- » **DEVELOPER:** DENNIS CASWELL
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5-10



For such an epic game, it may not be surprising to learn that the programmer responsible, Dennis Caswell, is a very unassuming person. After receiving a Master's degree in computer science from UCLA in 1981, an old roommate informed Caswell that his brother was starting his own games company. This company was Arcadia (later Starpath), responsible for the Supercharger hardware for the Atari 2600. After the videogames crash, Epyx bought Starpath, and most of the staff moved over with it.

Impossible Mission was Caswell's first (and only) project for Epyx after the acquisition but work had already begun before that happened. "I do recall that I started working on the running man before the merger with Epyx had been finalised. I distinctly remember my elation at trading in my 2600 for a Commodore 64. When I was given permission to start a C64 project, I unplugged my 2600 and threw it out of my office and into the hall," laughs Caswell.

"The game took about ten months to complete, though other people remember it taking less time than that. It was definitely not designed in detail before I started to code. The first thing I came up with was the





» Master System version, very colourful and pretty, pity it doesn't play as good as it looks



» Atari 7800 version of the game, possible or not?

"WHEN I WAS GIVEN PERMISSION TO START A C64 PROJECT, I UNPLUGGED MY 2600 AND THREW IT OUT OF MY OFFICE AND INTO THE HALL" DENNIS CASWELL



animation of the running man and part of what sold the game to the Epyx brass was the idea that the main character would be larger, more realistic and with more elaborate animation than was typically seen in platform games at that time. After that, I more or less made it up as I went along."

With permission granted, work began. "I got the idea from watching the movie *War Games*, though they may not seem very closely related. Somehow, the HAL-like computer in *War Games* led to the idea of a platform game in which the player was required to infiltrate a computer-controlled complex." While the game was inspired from a recent film, the name was based on something a lot more obvious. "During most of its development, I don't recall that *Impossible Mission* had a title. Eventually, it became time to prepare to market the thing, so we had to start calling it something. Somebody noticed the similarity to the TV show and suggested that *Mission: Impossible* would be appropriate but, of course, we couldn't actually use that, so we cheated and gave it a title that was legal while still creating the desired association. A bit embarrassing, I suppose, but most people seem to have forgiven us."

Caswell continues, "Apart from the speech, the game was conceived, designed, and executed entirely by me. I had no artist or sound guy or whatever. That's why there's no credits screen. The title screen says all there is to say. There were no graphics or sound design tools, either. The graphics, for example, were drawn on graph paper and converted into hex strings that were hand-typed into the code. I had to because I had no choice. We had no graphic design tools or aids of any kind, and given the coarse resolutions in which we worked in those days, I found it easier to design things directly on graph paper, rather than drawing conventionally and trying to somehow digitise everything afterwards."

Impossible Mission sees the battle between Agent 4125 and his attempts to stop Elvin Atombender, a brilliant scientist gone mad, from launching a nuclear strike against the world. A game is also quite often fondly remembered for its protagonists and *Impossible Mission* is no exception. The Agent himself, while only appearing again in the 1988 sequel, lived on in sprite form; Epyx later used the same animation in some of the *Games* series, and unofficially appeared in other programs such as *Kane* by Mastertronic. The design of Atombender was a little closer to home, with his love of technology and loathing of humans. "I chose programming [as a career] because I found it easy and amusing and because I had received assurances that one could make a living at it. I'm also rather maladjusted socially and often prefer the society of machines to that of people." Caswell admits.

The running man design also caused a few problems. "There was a problem getting the game to fit into the available memory. The running man has lots of frames of animation (and I if recall takes three sprites) and he has to run in both directions. I ended up just storing the frames in one direction and letting the game flip them back and forth as needed. The game probably spends more time doing that than anything else. Reversing the running man's sprites did take a great deal of the processor's time. Fortunately, *Impossible Mission* was not otherwise computationally intensive, so there was enough time to spare."

Upon starting the game, the first thing noticeable is that this is no ordinary hideout.

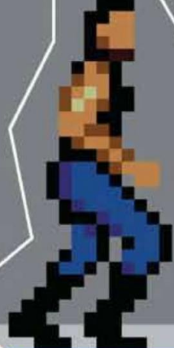


THEY SAID:

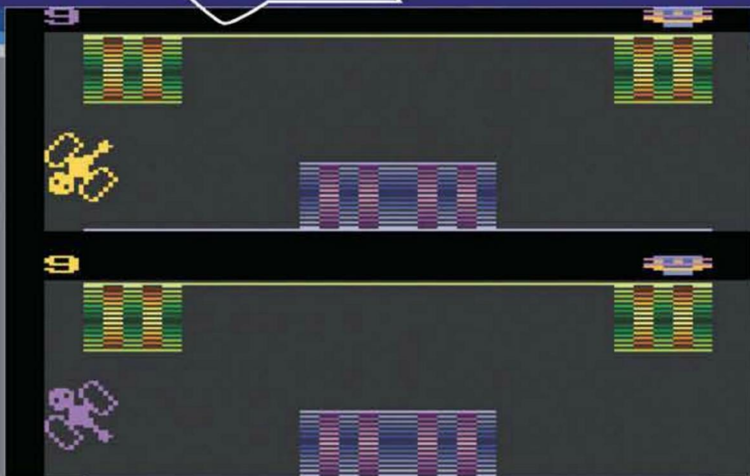
"IMPOSSIBLE MISSION IS A CLASSIC COMMODORE GAME BECAUSE OF ITS ACE GRAPHICS, SOUND, BRILLIANT GAME CONTENT AND SPEECH"
CRASH

THE MAKING OF...

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION



"I GOT THE IDEA FOR THE GAME FROM WATCHING THE MOVIE WAR GAMES, THOUGH IT MAY NOT SEEM THAT THEY'RE VERY CLOSELY RELATED"



» Last game released for the Supercharger, an early multiplayer party type program

PAL VS NTSC

Although US Gold did eventually release the game in the UK, the original CBS version from the US was available to buy if you could find it. This came with a sting in its tail; in the form of an unforeseen glitch resulting from the positioning code for the electricity bolts being handled slightly differently on a PAL C64 compared to an NTSC C64. If a robot's firing pattern calls for it to shoot on the far left of the screen, the poor agent would be fried no matter where in the room he was. US Gold got around this by patching the game to prevent the robots firing in this situation; the cracking group Remember actually fixed the glitch properly in its 1997 release of the game.



Rooms run off many lift shafts throughout the construction, platforms seemingly hang in mid-air, with large gaps waiting to catch unwary people. Occasionally there may be large sentry balls (in true *Prisoner* fashion) that track your every move and then there are the human-seeking robots. Nasty things those, they have a tendency to do the unexpected and you can never really tell what sort of programming each one has until you are potentially within shooting range! Fortunately, Agent 4125 is pretty agile, with a decent running speed and a quality somersault that will hopefully get you out of any immediate danger. All of this still doesn't make the task of reaching the pieces of furniture in each room any easier.

Ah yes, the furniture. Elvin may be something of a genius but he is also very absent-minded, too. Access to his control room, the target of your insurgence, consists of a nine-letter password. Each letter is in the form of an old-fashioned punch card and each card has been broken up into four different pieces. These pieces have been scattered about in the chairs, tables, vending machines, toilets and other appliances in the hideout. Why furniture? Caswell explains, "I imagined the underground complex as being not only Elvin's workplace but also his residence, so the standard residential accoutrements seemed appropriate. If there sometimes seems to be an implausible profusion of bathrooms, bookcases or what-have-you, we'll just have to chalk that up to his reclusive eccentricity."

It was one thing getting all the password pieces; it was another putting them together. It was a genius concept, one that hasn't been reused since, but Caswell plays down its idea. "You're very kind, but it's really just a jigsaw puzzle. It does seem likely that I made the puzzle pieces resemble punch cards for sentimental reasons. I haven't heard specific feedback about the puzzle pieces but I have observed first-hand that the mental skills required to assemble the puzzles (you have to be able to reflect and superimpose images in your head) seem entirely distinct from those required to defeat the robots and the Rover ball. People who can handle the joystick twitching fairly easily have been known to struggle with the puzzle pieces."

As for the passwords themselves, Caswell muses, "I probably just used the first eight nine-letter words I thought of. Recently, I have found a source listing of *Impossible Mission* tucked away in a drawer and I looked



» No, no, no… there's no limits, I mean missiles going off now



» A new version of *Impossible Mission* is now available from System 3, pictured here is the PSP version



them up. They are swordfish, asparagus, artichoke, crocodile, alligator, albatross, butterfly and cormorant."

So, complete the puzzle, access the control room and beat the game. Sounds easy doesn't it? To this day, it still taunts people, even though in reality it isn't actually that hard. Completing the game results in a great ending picture and more of that fabulous speech. Caswell recalls the process of adding it, "The speech in the game was real, digitised speech. Electronic Speech Systems, who also provided the software for reproducing the speech on the Commodore 64, provided the performances. I told them what I wanted the game to say and when they asked me what kind of voice I had in mind, I said I was imagining a fiftyish English guy, like a James Bond villain. I was told that they happened to have such a person on their staff, so, instead of hiring an actor, they let him take a whack at it and I thought he was just fine. I never met the guy who provided the voice, but, to my knowledge, the recordings were not altered or processed, apart from being digitised. It is certainly possible, though, that ESS could have tweaked them without my knowledge. There are no other digitised sounds in the game. As I recall, the digitised speech wasn't planned from the start; we grafted it on later as it was relatively easy to do."

Upon release, the game was heralded with critical acclaim and eventually won the British Microcomputing Award for best game of 1985, with good reason. You just feel the need to have another go and then another, and then sometime later look up and find six hours have gone by with you trying to defeat the damn program regardless of how many times of success. It's a pure case of gameplay winning over looks, except here the graphics and sound are superb as well. There is absolutely nothing to fault the game on whatsoever.

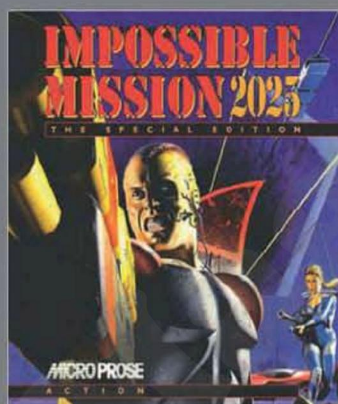
After completing the game and subsequently helping complete *Pitstop II*, Caswell had a falling out with the Epyx management and left the company. After producing a couple of educational titles, Caswell almost found himself back at Epyx programming for the Lynx "… but they discovered that they couldn't afford to hire anybody". He also had no involvement with the C64 sequel in 1988 that was programmed by Novotrade in Hungary.

From that, Caswell wrote *Ultimate Air Combat* for the NES and lastly, *Battle Bugs* for Sierra, though ironically he ended up back at Epyx on hire to program it. But that was to be Caswell's last game. "Until *Battle Bugs*, every game I had ever worked on was eventually completed and marketed. After *Battle Bugs*, my luck changed entirely. Nothing I worked on at Sega or 3DO ever saw the light of day and I eventually decided that I no longer belonged in the game business and put myself out to pasture, where I have remained since."

Today, Caswell is currently married with two kids and lives just outside Seattle working in the aviation industry. The last word remains with him. "I'd just like to say thanks for the opportunity to recall my gaming years. I'm just truly amazed that anyone still remembers this stuff."



» US Gold's packaging of the game



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Impossible Mission 2 (1988),
Impossible Mission 2025 (1993-4)

"PEOPLE WHO CAN HANDLE THE JOYSTICK TWITCHING FAIRLY EASILY HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO STRUGGLE WITH THE PUZZLE PIECES."

OTHER SYSTEMS

As is inevitable, the success of the game meant it was ported to many other systems over time, though sadly none of them quite managed to capture the same feel and passion. The Master System version actually has better graphics but the controls feel a little off and, of the rest, the BBC version probably plays the best. Spare a thought for poor Atari 7800 owners in the US, though; while the PAL version was fine, the NTSC version has a bug that allowed puzzle pieces to be hidden under the terminals, effectively making them impossible to get and hence actually fulfilling the meaning of the game's title. Fortunately, an enterprising programmer was able to solve the issue a couple of years ago and produce a working ROM.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PHASER PATROL
SYSTEMS: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

ESCAPE FROM THE MINDMASTER
SYSTEMS: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

ULTIMATE AIR COMBAT
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1992





THE CLASSIC GAME
SILENT HILL

Haunted House, Alone In The Dark and Resident Evil – three major survival horrors that birthed and evolved the concept. Then suddenly in 1999, some viewing it as bandwagon jumping, Konami gave the genre a darker shade of depravity through Silent Hill. Let's return to that town, a nightmarish place of burned children, satanic cults and a malevolence that lurks behind the shadows



» Masked bodies suspended, almost crucified on wires, is a recurring theme in *Silent Hill*

The first *Silent Hill* is the best and the scariest in the entire series. Some controversial statements are opinion, others, such as the one that started this article, are fact. The original's superiority over its follow-ups is the direct result of its limitations; it joins the short list of retro games that are excellent mainly by virtue of their age and the ingrained facets that result from this. The restrictions of the hardware are what today put this game above its rivals. Let's be crudely blunt here; the grainy, dirty polygon textures of the first game are honestly more likely to scare the shit out of you than the smoother refined visuals of the sequels. It's one thing to see clearly defined super-shiny monsters but it's far more unnerving when the thing you're looking at appears as if it's washed its face with a bundle of rusted razor wire.

Another result of the technical limitations was fogging, even indoors, which was maintained for the sequels despite more powerful hardware. Everything in the original *Silent Hill* is swathed in either grey mist or darkness. The fog exists in the "real" world, hiding the roaming skinless dogs and other enemies from view, while the inky black of night occurs in the nightmarish alternate reality of the town. It is this other world where most people's fear comes from, as the protagonist, Harry Mason, again and again has to force himself through the horrors of this most unnatural of places. Every surface is encrusted with what appears to be rust, or blood, and the walls are often replaced with barbed wire and chain link fences.

For those that have seen it, the depraved filth-saturated atmosphere, plus other elements of *Silent Hill*, are taken directly from the film *Jacob's Ladder*. Watching this flick, which stars Tim Robbins, it's quite astounding just how much Team Silent borrowed. But there's no attempt to hide various influences and, in fact, *Silent Hill* openly boasts of its source material by naming various streets after horror writers and other things connected to surreal and scary forms of media (there are several *Twin Peaks* references, which, along with several of Lynche's creations, was also a major influence for the games).

Another of *Silent Hill*'s strengths was its use of sound and audio cues – this again follows the limitations theme. Enemies could not easily be seen because of the limited draw distance and so, to alert you to their presence, a special radio was available. Later games reused the idea but at the time it was an ingenious decision and the sheer terror created by the white noise that crackled



» A tank of gasoline! A tank of gasoline! My kingdom for a tank of gasoline!

THE FIRST SILENT HILL IS THE BEST AND THE SCARIEST IN THE ENTIRE SERIES. IT'S BECAUSE OF THE GRAINY, DIRTY POLYGON-TEXTURES

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1999
- » **GENRE:** SURVIVAL HORROR
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5


» What the hell is happening? This hideously deformed and crucified figure marks the opening of the game


» This opening scene in the diner sets up and reveals the importance of the radio



» Suddenly, while in the mall, these TV screens come to life and echo the cries of Harry's lost daughter. It's quite chilling


» This is the deformed serpent boss. But look to the right. Notice the human body engulfed in flames? Creepy…

TERROR IS ALWAYS MORE COMPLETE WHEN COUPLED WITH THE UNCOMFORTABLE REALISATION THAT THERE IS NO HOPE

out of it was palpable. The sound nurtured a Pavlovian response, where even if enemies can't (or don't) exist, the sound of the radio causes an adrenaline spike. At one curdling point, there are invisible ghost children which, while not causing any actual harm, cause the radio to scream static wildly. There is also the sound of random banging and scraping on the walls, as if the abyss's unnatural spawn were trying to break through, into your mind. It's deeply unsettling.

At every opportunity it evokes powerful negative emotions in the player. Later on, when discovering a motorbike, shrouded in darkness and finding that it's out of petrol, you want to fall to the ground crying, screaming at the TV, begging for just one canister of gasoline so as to escape the nightmare. Faced with such hopelessness and despair, you instead hold the sawn-off shotgun close to your chest and, with a demented glint in a twitching eye, vow that if hell is about to consume you, you'll go down firing and laughing like a deranged psychopathic madman on the edge. Terror is always more complete when coupled with the uncomfortable realisation that there is no hope. *Silent Hill* is always bleak – even with its happiest of endings – and the fact the main protagonist seems trapped in a looping never-ending nightmare (not to mention being on the verge of insanity) makes it seem all the more futile. The inescapability of replayed scenarios lends things a gloriously abhorrent kind of nihilism. Playing it today it's slow, linear, has convoluted puzzles and is very clunky. Combat is imprecise, difficult, with limited ammo and too many melee weapons. The whole thing has a giddy surrealism to it, as you fight moths, slugs and giant lizards. However, these things must be accepted as intentional and, once acknowledged, the game is still as terrifying and disturbing as it ever was. It was never about combat; Harry Mason is a writer and it's logical that he would have more success running from, than confronting evil. The vague and disorientating puzzles were needed; they helped convey the otherworldly location you had descended into.

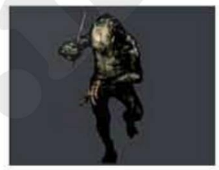
The same goes for the bosses, which were a stark contrast to the demonic "general enemies" found throughout. While games like *Resident Evil* had a cohesive internal logic with regards to puzzles and bosses, *Silent Hill* meandered about like a chimpanzee drunk on meths, nauseous and dizzy, forcing you to stumble without being able to catch your balance afterwards. The bosses did not appear as if they belonged, which was a jolt to the system; confusing and unnatural in a world that was already an aberration – it begged the question, was Harry Mason simply going insane? It of course has problems but *Silent Hill* uses such a focused (though admittedly borrowed) visual style and carries it off with such momentum, that it makes for a thrilling dip into chilling and murky waters. And, as we've said, the first is still the best.


» This is precisely what we mean. Large, chunky and pixelated visuals. Filthy and rust-covered, everything conveys a sense of foreboding


» We've always found the unsanitary conditions of the hospital to be deeply unsettling

THE KIDS AREN'T ALRIGHT

Censorship of the media. It's a practice employed by tyrannical governments and nefarious agencies wishing to control and manipulate the public consciousness – keeping us passive, and receptive. Pushing us ever deeper into the Orwellian dystopia we are currently in, is the UK version of *Silent Hill*. While both the US and Japanese releases retained all their original content, as its creators intended, when the game hit Britannia's censorship-besieged shores it lost one of its main monsters. The Grey Children (pictured), which inhabit the school, were removed. They were ungodly looking monsters that wielded knives and apparently the ominous noise they make is the sound of children laughing, digitally slowed down. They freaked the hell out of us. They were replaced with Mumblers, strange brown dwarven monsters with claws, which weren't nearly as disturbing. So if you're going to play *Silent Hill*, make sure you get the US version. Failing that, join a guerrilla movement and overthrow the UK's oppressive government. Down with censorship, freedom of expression for all!



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GENSO SUIKODEN
SYSTEMS: PS1, SATURN
YEAR: 1995

LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1991

TOKIMEKI MEMORIAL
SYSTEMS: PC ENGINE
YEAR: 1994



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

From the inception of Ultimate in the Eighties, to the launch of *Perfect Dark Zero* on the Xbox 360, Chris and Tim Stamper, the brothers behind uber-developer Rare, have shunned the limelight. Right from the start they did things differently to their peers and the results speak for themselves. Having delivered classics from *JetPac* to *GoldenEye*, the enigmatic team from the wilds of Leicestershire have left their indelible mark on every era of home gaming. Dan Whitehead investigates…



IN BRIEF

Originally formed in 1982 by brothers Chris and Tim Stamper, Rare is one of Britain's videogame success stories and is still thriving 24 years later. Initially creating games for the ZX Spectrum, Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd (as it was then known) later became Ultimate Play the Game, and finally, Rare. Along the way, the Twycross-based developers formed a close partnership with Nintendo and had a string of hit titles across a wide range of its consoles. Now owned by Microsoft, Rare is currently working on a brand new *Banjo Kazooie* game.



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

A RARE BREED



If you owned an 8-bit computer in the Eighties, then chances are you had at least one game that boasted the famous blue and green logo of Ultimate Play The Game on its loading screen. If you owned any of the Nintendo systems from the NES up to the N64, chances are you played more than a few games bearing the Rare logo. And if you've got yourself an Xbox 360… well, you see where this is going.

Most developers are lucky to rise to the top in one era of gaming without stumbling or being swallowed by a faceless rival and, while Rare may now be a part of the Microsoft empire, the company still retains its own identity and acclaim. However, as with most of these stories, things began on a much smaller scale. It was 1980 and the 21-year-old Chris Stamper, then studying physics and electronics at Loughborough University, was bowled over by the emerging world of micro technology – and in particular the way that computers could be used to control things on the screen.

With off-the-shelf home computers still a pipe dream he assembled his own from a kit – the RCA CDP1802 – the fastest machine around at the time. Teaching himself how to program, Stamper created a traffic light management system and was hooked. Quitting his degree course, he took a job working on the circuit boards of early arcade machines, converting *Space Invaders* into *Galaxian* and fixing bugs. When the ZX80 arrived on the high street, he snapped one up and spent two years mastering the intricacies of games programming. Finally convinced he had a handle on how to create better games than the early commercial efforts, Chris joined forces with his younger brother Tim, his girlfriend (and later wife) Carole Ward, and an old college friend, John Latchbury. They even had some transatlantic connections thanks to their arcade work, with Joel Hochberg of Miami-based Coin-It Inc as their American contact.

With these basic pieces in place, in 1982 the group formed Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd. Funding their early growth by selling pre-made arcade conversion kits, they worked in the house next door to their parents' newsagents in glamorous Ashby-de-la-Zouch, before beginning trading under the title Ultimate Play the Game. Chris and John concentrated on the programming, while Tim and Carole handled graphics. It was a small but efficient set-up. In an interview with Keith Ainsworth's *Retrogamer* fanzine, the Stamper brothers looked fondly back on these formative years.

"They were great times. When we had deliveries we would store goods in the toilet, on the stairs, in our bedrooms. We had no money - when bills came in we all chipped in. The electricity one was always huge but we made sure that was paid first."

After six months of mounting debts, in May 1983 Ultimate struck gold with its very first commercial release – a single-screen shooting game for the ZX Spectrum called *Jetpac*. In an era when computer owners gobbled up any new software, as much for the novelty as for playability, *Jetpac* delivered both in spades. Fast, furious and enormous fun, it played more like the arcade machines Chris had worked on as a young man than a first effort on a new format, and it set a high



» Even in the 8-bit era Rare's talent shone through

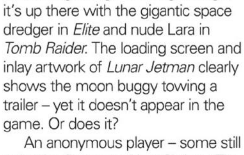
» Jet Force Gemini is an overlooked classic

» Only Nintendo make better platformers

JETMAN'S TRAILER PARK

As far as gaming urban legends go, it's up there with the gigantic space dredger in *Elite* and nude Lara in *Tomb Raider*. The loading screen and inlay artwork of *Lunar Jetman* clearly shows the moon buggy towing a trailer – yet it doesn't appear in the game. Or does it?

An anonymous player – some still point the finger at either Chris or Tim Stamper – sent a screenshot into *Crash* magazine showing the buggy hooked up to the legendary trailer, thus sending thousands of gamers scurrying to spend agonising hours exploring every inch of the freakishly tough game looking for the space caravan. Debate raged in letters pages and playgrounds across the UK, as gamers boasted that they'd seen it themselves.



So did it exist?
Er, no. An enterprising soul disassembled the entire game code and found not one trace of a trailer among the sprite files, thus conclusively disproving the myth. But did you know about the helicopter in *Sabre Wulf*? That's real. Honest. We've got pictures and everything…

benchmark for the other nascent British software houses to match. Selling more than 300,000 copies, *Jetpac* ensured that with only one game to its credit, Ultimate already had a turnover in excess of 1 million pounds.

Its experience in dealing with arcade companies in the US and Japan meant that unlike many of the emerging UK developers, Ultimate combined a passion for technology with shrewd business sense. At a time when many games were still written in BASIC, Chris and Tim were beavering away in Z80 machine code, making their games faster, slicker and more compelling than their competition. While the image of the naïve bedroom Speccy coder prevailed – no doubt inspired in part by the eccentric professor appearance of Sir Clive himself – the Stampers were already thinking ahead, and building a business plan for the next generation of games hardware.

In the meantime, however, they kept servicing the existing market, and within two months of *Jetpac's* launch they'd added another three games to the Ultimate portfolio – the ozone-destroying pesticide game *Pssst* hit in June, with *Trans Am* and *Cookie* following in July. As 1984 dawned, Ultimate's output was beefed up to take advantage of the 48K Spectrum and the *Jetpac* sequel, *Lunar Jetman* and *Atic Atac* made the most of the new processing muscle. *Lunar Jetman* introduced scrolling gameplay, as Jetman tried to get his Moonglider buggy back to base, but *Atic Atac* in particular left rival titles in the dust. A vast maze game, it was one of the first titles to feature a multi-level game map, with stairs leading up and down, secret doorways linking rooms and trapdoors plunging you down to the level below. You could even choose one of three heroic characters and the choice actually impacted the gameplay by determining which hidden passageways you could use. The aim of the game was simple – find the three pieces of the ACG key (a cute nod to Ashby Computers & Graphics, of course) and escape from the front door of the castle. However, the sheer size and complexity of the game made it a mammoth undertaking for players.

1984 also saw the computer magazine trade take notice of the rising popularity of games, with many of the existing technical titles introducing a more gamesy slant, and the launch of *Crash*, a magazine that shoved the serious side of computing out of the way and appealed directly to the growing number of kids and teens hunched over their rubber keyboards. *Crash* scored both *Atic Atac* and *Lunar Jetman* highly, awarding *Atic Atac* 92% and *Jetman* 95% (with a staggering 100% awarded for Value For Money). Thus began a long and fruitful relationship between Ultimate and Newsfield's mag. In an exclusive 1987 interview for *Crash*, Tim Stamper admitted that Ultimate had a soft spot for the Ludlow-based publication.

"*Crash* always gave us fair reviews," he told editor Roger Kean, "but with some of the other magazines, if we didn't advertise, the product got a bad review – and I was actually told by a few of the other companies that they thought the problem existed as well. So we steered clear of speaking to anyone, and if they liked the product great, and if they didn't I wasn't bothered, because if the sales were there people were buying it."

Already the mystique surrounding these gaming alchemists was growing, cementing their reputation as a company that followed its own rulebook. They didn't do exclusives, they didn't do interviews or press visits and they sent out review copies to all the mags at the same time, usually right before the game went on sale. This veil of secrecy wasn't deliberate – at least not at first. It was simply because the team was small and incredibly busy, so dealing with journalists was not a priority. As time went by though, Tim and Chris realised that the air of mystery was actually beneficial to the company – giving them a sort of Willy Wonka meets Stanley Kubrick allure, the reclusive geniuses of the Spectrum world.

Between the bestselling games and the almost complete lack of information about the people who made them, Ultimate became one of the first games companies to not only earn brand recognition, with gamers looking forward to the next release because of the company



» Like all early Ultimate games, *Sabre Wulf* came with no instructions

» Multiplayer action at its very best



"KNIGHT LORE, THE SEQUEL TO SABRE WULF, TOOK THE FUZZY, FEATURELESS LOOK OF EARLY ISOMETRIC PIONEERS LIKE ANT ATTACK AND TURNED IT UP TO ELEVEN"

rather than the concept, but also one of the first developers to have a bona fide fanbase. And if Ultimate kept the press at arm's length, the opposite was true of the people who played their games.

"We could have expanded, like some companies did, with a large fan club and giveaways and posters to buy," Tim told *Crash*. "And we could have said, 'If you like Ultimate, buy the games, buy sweatshirts,' but in fact we gave them all away. If anyone asked us for a sweatshirt or a cap we said 'well, you can have it'. We were just interested in seeing the software out there and getting fair reviews."

The games kept coming and so did the innovations. *Sabre Wulf* was the first Spectrum game to abandon the traditional £5.50 price point, leaping to a then unimaginable £9.95. The idea was to try to stop people letting friends tape the games, assuming that if people paid more for something, they'd be less willing to let someone else swipe it for free. The price hike didn't harm *Sabre Wulf's* sales though and higher prices soon became standard for all Spectrum software.

It was the company's next release that truly defined Ultimate for many gamers though. While 3D graphics weren't completely new, *Knight Lore* – the sequel to *Sabre Wulf* – took the fuzzy, featureless look of early isometric pioneers like *Ant Attack* and turned it up to 11. With large, bold sprites and intricate room designs, it isn't overstating the case to say that *Knight Lore's* Filmation graphics engine did for gaming what sound did for the movies. It opened up the gameworld, allowed gamers freedom of movement in all directions, and gave designers the chance to devise ever-more fiendish challenges. It's safe to say that without *Knight Lore* there'd be no *Tomb Raider* and modern gaming would look very different. And yet, amazingly, *Knight Lore* was finished before the 2D action of *Sabre Wulf*. Showing their now customary business acumen, the Stampers realised that the market wasn't yet ready for such a quantum leap, and hitting gamers with their 3D masterpiece would only limit interest in *Sabre Wulf*.

"If we released *Knight Lore* we wouldn't have sold *Sabre Wulf*", Tim told *Crash*. "There was a little bit of careful planning in there. We just had to sit on it because everyone else was so far behind." So it came to pass that a defining classic of the 8-bit era sat on the shelf until the time was right.

Once the 3D floodgate was opened, there was no stopping Ultimate. *Alien 8*, *Nightshade* and *Pentagram* all used the same viewpoint, while additional development teams were set to work on C64, Amstrad and BBC conversions. By the time the Western adventure *Gunfright* came around in 1986, reviewers were starting to express misgivings about Ultimate's reliance on their Filmation technique and Chris and Tim were realising that they'd pushed the Spectrum as far as it could go. While most of the Britsoft publishers saw their future in the imminent arrival of 16-bit computers like the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST, the Stampers had their eyes on a different prize. Thanks to their arcade contacts – and their international outlook – Chris and Tim had been following the development of standalone games machines coming out of Japan. In fact, as far back as 1983, when *Jetpac* was state of the art, they were tinkering with the early Nintendo Entertainment System and figuring out how to make games for it.

"We knew a market was going to boom in Japan and America and we set Rare up to handle that", said Tim in 1987. "Obviously we didn't want to give too much away because we needed time to develop our associations before they really became aware of it."

For a company seen as quintessentially English, it was a bold but shrewd move for the pair. Retaining a stake in Ultimate, they sold off the label to US Gold and moved over to their new company – Rare. And as Ultimate withered away, offering only the *Collected Works* compilation as a farewell, for most British gamers the secretive whizz kids seemed to vanish from the scene.

In actual fact, having convinced Nintendo to allow it official access to the NES development circuit, Rare was incredibly busy – turning out dozens of titles for the console and licensing them to American publishers. Going from being the toast of the town in the Spectrum

THE MYSTERY OF MIRE MARE

The ending of *Underwurlde* featured three exits from the castle, each bringing up an ending screen highlighting one of three planned sequels in the Sabreman saga. The first, *Knight Lore*, we all know about – it revolutionised 8-bit gaming. A second sequel, *Pentagram*, followed in 1985, but what of the promised third Sabreman game, the cryptically titled *Mire Mare*?

As well as being trailed at the end of *Undewurlde* and *Pentagram*, it was briefly mentioned in *Sinclair User's* June 1987 issue where they stated that "US Gold knows nothing about it and Ultimate is, as usual, locked in a bunker and not talking to anybody." Other than those hints, the existence of the game slowly slipped into the realms of myth.

However, a recent interview with a conveniently anonymous ex-Ultimate employee on the Ultimate Appreciation website claimed that the game was not only pretty much completed (before *Gunfright* came out, no less) but that it was held back because Chris and Tim Stamper wanted it to be the big Spectrum finale for the Ultimate brand. However, by that point, Ultimate was in the hands of US Gold and the Stampers were – allegedly – so unimpressed with the large corporation's desire to focus on budget re-releases rather than investing in new titles that they pretended *Mire Mare* wasn't even close to being finished, just to keep it out of US Gold's clutches. Everyone moved on and the code for *Mire Mare*, so painfully close to completion, was damned to an eternity in limbo.

Fact or fiction? Well, frankly the story reeks of rampant fan speculation or industry rumour mongering, as nothing in Chris or Tim's history suggests the sort of people who'd let a great game, months of work and a sizeable profit sink into oblivion just for the sake of a petty grudge, but who knows? Maybe one day some completed code will bubble up from out of the online soup and we will know the truth for sure…



» *Perfect Dark Zero* was one of the key Xbox 360 launch titles

» *Roger Rabbit* – a fine film licence

» Rare's last Nintendo game before jumping ship

"IT WAS CLEAR THAT DESPITE THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL COMMON GROUND, NINTENDO'S FUTURE IN THE HARDWARE MARKET WAS SHAKY AND RARE COULDN'T AFFORD TO KEEP ALL ITS EGGS IN THEIR BASKET"

ULTIMATE HOMEBREW

Given their iconic status in the minds of most retro gamers, and the fact that ROMs of the originals are strictly forbidden, it's no surprise that the Ultimate games are well represented on the homebrew remake scene. *Jetpac* leads the way, thanks to its simple gameplay, with dozens of variations. Most capture the charm and fun of the original but some go that extra mile. *Jetpac* 2003, available on Remakes.org, delivers 3D graphics and varied levels while *Super Mario Pac* (www.hermitgames.com) combines the water-squirting fun from *Mario Sunshine* with *Jetpac* gameplay to hilarious effect. *Lunar Jetman* receives similar treatment in *Looney Jetman* over at www.retro-games.co.uk, in a game that finally includes the infamous trailer.

A gorgeous-looking update of *Knight Lore* can be downloaded from classic-retro-games.com and, while it doesn't add anything beyond modern graphics, the sheer size of the game is impressive. *Atic Atac* fans can choose between a straight remake from MinionSoft (www.minionsoft.com), or *The Burps*, an *Atic Atac* inspired title that features a rather dubious sheep obsession. Get that curio from www.ovine.net. *Sabre Wulf* is well represented by Sandwell Software (www.dexfx.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk) whose remake is spookily accurate – but retains the flaws of the original as well as its plus points.

And finally, the swarthy gents at RetroSpec (retrospect.sgn.net) offer up groovy new PC versions of *Jetpac*, *Lunar Jetman*, *Cookie* and *Pssst* with their usual aplomb. RetroSpec is also currently working on a remake of *Sabre Wulf*.

market to an anonymous code factory for a weird Japanese toy probably seemed like lunacy to rivals but by 1989 Rare was pumping out 17 titles a year rather than the 5 or 6 it used to produce as Ultimate. From major TV and movie tie-ins to original concepts, Rare kept delivering products on time, on budget and racking up impressive sales for its US paymasters. It didn't take long for Nintendo to realise that the UK company was a valuable asset and a strong working relationship developed between the two. Having clocked up a staggering 41 NES games in four years – plus Game Boy conversions – Rare was well-placed for preferential treatment when the next-generation consoles rolled off the production line.

If the rivalry between Nintendo and Sega was fierce over the Master System and NES, it got positively bloody with the Genesis/Mega Drive and SNES on the shelves. Despite having a powerful console, Nintendo couldn't compete with Sega's edgier image and the SNES struggled to make its mark. Enter Rare. It had been working on a way of transferring the hi-res graphical output of their Silicon Graphics workstations to the new SNES system and impressed Nintendo's Genyo Takeda when he paid them a visit. "We decided to show him a demonstration of a boxing game we had created using rendered graphics on a Silicon Graphics workstation", Chris Stamper told the Screenager website, "He was very impressed and asked what it would look like on a SNES, so into the evening and the next day we had two of our engineers work on taking the 24-bit true colour imagery and converting it to SNES." The result was enough to earn Rare unprecedented freedom to deliver a killer app for the Japanese giant's struggling console. With Mario off-limits, Chris and Tim looked into the Nintendo back catalogue for a character that had enough recognition to make a splash with gamers, but one with enough flexibility to allow them room to make improvements. One name stood out above all others – Donkey Kong. Back in the day, the grumpy monkey had been the star with Mario reduced to supporting status but, by 1993 he'd been left by the wayside. In fact, he'd dropped so far off the radar that his last appearance had been years earlier in an educational title for the NES. Rare had found its new hero.

The resulting game, *Donkey Kong Country*, not only turned around the fortunes of the SNES, it put Rare in the development spotlight. As consoles made their first major inroads into the British market, UK gamers at last discovered what the minds behind Sabreman had been up to these long years. Such was *Donkey Kong Country's* prowess – from the astonishing graphics to the impeccable game design – it not only held Sega at bay, but many also credited it with sinking the likes of 3DO and the Atari Jaguar. Why splash out on an unproven new console, the reasoning went, when Nintendo's 16-bit machine can deliver gameplay and graphics like this? Needless to say, Rare was now one of Nintendo's key developers and it was kept busy building the Donkey Kong brand with sequels and Game Boy conversions while the technology geared up for the next technological shift.

The launch of the Nintendo 64 came in 1996, with Sega and console newcomer Sony already head-to-head with CD-based 32-bit machines. Nintendo did things its own way and opted for a cartridge-based 64-bit system. While many saw Sony gobbling up market share with its huge investment in hundreds of titles, Chris and Tim Stamper stayed loyal to Nintendo, with a preference for quality over quantity.

"I think Sony has a wonderful brand name and they have a very good machine", Chris told *Edge* magazine in 1997, "but at the end of the day I think that if it's quality that you're looking for, I think that you have to pick the N64."

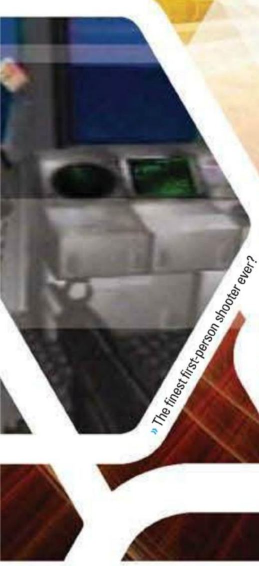
"It's kind of getting like the old budget market in the UK in the Eighties, when there was a rush of substandard software", Tim agreed, "I mean, we're in the industry and I couldn't tell you what all the PlayStation games are like. If you gave me a list of the 300 or so titles released by this Christmas, I just wouldn't know what they're like. And how anybody else, a mother, a father, or brother or somebody who's got a machine – is going to know which game to buy unless they're specifically told is beyond me."



HANDHELD WULF

In 2004 Rare made one of its, well, rare forays into its closely guarded back catalogue by producing a *Sabre Wulf* game for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Naturally, many retro fans drooled in anticipation at the prospect of a portable version of the beloved classic, but Rare had other plans. Rather than an updated jungle maze romp, the resulting title was more of a traditional platformer – with a small smattering of adventure elements – as Sabreman travelled from village to village solving puzzles and going on quests. The meat of the gameplay involved finding and using a variety of friendly creatures (such as Blubba the bear) to get past obstacles. At the end of each level was the item you were after, as well as the angry 'wulf' of the title. He then chased you back through the level, leading to some breathless last-minute escapes.

It was actually a charming and innovative game, and received favourable reviews, but sales were elusive. For fans of the franchise, the fact that it clearly wasn't the *Sabre Wulf* of old was a turn off. For everyone else, the *Sabre Wulf* brand just wasn't popular enough to stand alongside the likes of *Pokémon* and other gaming juggernauts. Rare continues to plug away at the handheld market though, with *Banjo Pilot* being another recent update of a past hit for the portable player.



» The finest first-person shooter ever?



» Sabre Wulf in name alone

The reason for the *Edge* interview was, of course, the launch of yet another Rare classic, and yet another killer app for Nintendo developed by the Rare team – *GoldenEye*. Although the brothers were wary about taking on a major licence for such a high-profile console, their reputation gave them the sort of creative freedom that would allow them to deliver a superb game, and a great adaptation. In fact, Rare was able to deliver a Nintendo game that included violent death, something of a first for the squeaky clean company.

GoldenEye was an international smash, earning awards and plaudits across the board. Rare went on to deliver another hit for the console in the shape of *Diddy Kong Racing*, a standard kart racer that marked the first time the Rare name was used to publish a title. More N64 games followed but as the format battled in vain to catch up to the PlayStation, inventive and entertaining titles like *Jet Force Gemini*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* and *Banjo-Kazooie* found limited audiences. The *GoldenEye* team's second offering, *Perfect Dark*, wowed those who played it in 2000 but without the money-making Bond licence it just wasn't enough to pull the N64 out of its nosedive. It was clear that despite their philosophical common ground, Nintendo's future in the hardware market was shaky and Rare couldn't afford to keep all its eggs in one basket. Rumours of a buyout flew, as publishers sized up the company's potential. Somebody would buy it, that much was obvious. But who?

In 2002 the mystery was solved. Rare was absorbed into Microsoft Game Studios to produce titles for the Xbox. Despite a shaky start to this phase of Rare's life, with more time spent, ironically, on Game Boy titles and only the lukewarm reception given to *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* to justify Microsoft's investment, the company is now starting to find its feet again, despite the Stamper Brothers sensationally announcing their departure at the beginning of this year.

Unlike so many other once-great Britsoft legends which got lost in the swamp of corporate ownership, Rare still operates much as Ultimate once did. Press is limited, secrecy is paramount… and gameplay is king.

SOFTOGRAPHY

1983

Jetpac (Spectrum, BBC, Vic 20) - Ultimate
Atic Atac (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Pssst (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Tranz Am (Spectrum) – Ultimate

1984

Alien 8 (Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) – Ultimate
Entombed (C64) - Ultimate
Cookie (Spectrum) – Ultimate
Knight Lore (Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) – Ultimate
Lunar Jetman (Spectrum, BBC) – Ultimate
Sabre Wulf (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC) – Ultimate
The Staff of Karnath (C64) – Ultimate
Underwurlde (Spectrum, C64) - Ultimate

1985

Blackwyche (C64) – Ultimate
Nightshade (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC, MSX) - Ultimate
Pentagram (Spectrum, MSX) - Ultimate

1986

Outlaws (C64) – Ultimate
Cosmic Battlezones (BBC) – Ultimate
Cyberun (Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX) - Ultimate
Dragonskulle (C64) - Ultimate
Gunfright (Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX) – Ultimate
Imhotep (C64) - Ultimate

1987

Martianoids (Spectrum) - Ultimate
Bubbler (Spectrum, Amstrad) – Ultimate
Slalom (NES) - Nintendo

1988

The Collected Works (Spectrum) – Ultimate
R.C. Pro-Am (NES) – Nintendo
Wheel Of Fortune (NES) – Gametek
Jeopardy! (NES) - Gametek
Anticipation (NES) - Nintendo

1989

Marble Madness (NES) - Milton Bradley
World Games (NES) - Milton Bradley
WWF Wrestlemania (NES) – Acclaim
Sesame Street 123 (NES) - Hi Tech
California Games (NES) - Milton Bradley
Taboo (NES) – Tradewest
Wizards & Warriors (NES) – Acclaim
Who Framed Roger Rabbit? (NES) – LJN
Jordan Vs Bird: One on One (NES) - Milton Bradley
Cobra Triangle (NES) – Nintendo
Ironsword: Wizards & Warriors II (NES) – Acclaim
Silent Service (NES) - Ultra Games

1990

Double Dare (NES) – Gametek
Wheel Of Fortune: Family Edition (NES) – Gametek
Jeopardy! 25th Anniversary Edition (NES) – Gametek
The Amazing Spider-Man (Game Boy) – LJN
Captain Skyhawk (NES) - Milton Bradley
Pin Bot (NES) – Nintendo
Snake Rattle 'N' Roll (NES) – Nintendo
Super Off Road (NES) – Tradewest
Wizards & Warriors X: Fortress of Fear (Game Boy) - Acclaim
Narc (NES) - Acclaim
A Nightmare on Elm Street (NES) - LJN
Cabal (NES) - Milton Bradley
Time Lord (NES) - Milton Bradley
Arch Rivals (NES) – Acclaim
WWF Wrestlemania Challenge (NES) – LJN
Solar Jetman (NES) - Tradewest

1991

Digger T. Rock (NES) - Milton Bradley
WWF Superstars (Game Boy) – LJN
Battletoads (NES, Game Boy) – Tradewest
Beetlejuice (NES) - LJN Super
R.C. Pro-Am (Game Boy) – Nintendo
High Speed (NES) – Tradewest
Sneaky Snakes (Game Boy) – Tradewest
Pirates! (NES) - Ultra Games

1992

Wizards & Warriors III (NES) – Acclaim
Beetlejuice (Game Boy) – LJN
Indy Heat (NES) – Tradewest
R.C. Pro-Am II (NES) - Tradewest
Championship Pro-Am (Mega Drive) - Tradewest

1993

Battletoads (Mega Drive, Game Gear) – Tradewest
Battletoads Double Dragon (NES, SNES, Mega Drive, Game Boy) - Tradewest
Battletoads In Ragnarok's World (Game Boy) – Tradewest
Battletoads In Battlemaniacs (SNES) – Tradewest
X The Ball (Arcade) - Capcom/Brent Walker/Tecmo
Snake Rattle 'N' Roll (Mega Drive) - Sega/Tradewest

1994

Monster Max (Game Boy) – Titus
Super Battletoads (Arcade) - Electronic Arts
Donkey Kong Country (SNES) - Nintendo
Killer Instinct (Arcade) - Williams

1995

Donkey Kong Land (Game Boy) – Nintendo
Killer Instinct (SNES, Game Boy) – Nintendo
Donkey Kong Country 2 (SNES) – Nintendo

1996

Killer Instinct 2 (Arcade) – Williams
Ken Griffey JR's Winning Run (SNES) – Nintendo
Donkey Kong Land 2 (Game Boy) – Nintendo
Donkey Kong Country 3 (SNES) – Nintendo
Killer Instinct Gold (N64) – Nintendo

1997

Blast Corps (N64) – Nintendo
GoldenEye (N64) – Nintendo
Diddy Kong Racing (N64) – Rare
Donkey Kong Land III (Game Boy) – Nintendo

1998

Banjo-Kazooie (N64) – Nintendo

1999

Conker's Pocket Tales (GBC) – Rare
Jet Force Gemini (N64) – Rare
Donkey Kong 64 (N64) – Nintendo
Mickey's Racing Adventure (GBC) – Nintendo

2000

Perfect Dark (N64, GBC) – Rare
Donkey Kong Country (GBC) – Nintendo
Mickey's Speedway USA (N64) – Nintendo
Banjo-Tooie (N64) – Nintendo

2001

Mickey's Speedway USA (GBC) – Nintendo
Conker's Bad Fur Day (N64) – Rare

2002

Star Fox Adventures (GameCube) – Nintendo

2003

Donkey Kong Country (GBA) – Nintendo
Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge (GBA) – THQ
Grabbed By The Ghoulies (Xbox) - MGS

2004

Sabre Wulf (GBA) – THQ
Donkey Kong Country 2 (GBA) – Nintendo
It's Mr/ Pants (GBA) – THQ

2005

Banjo Pilot (GBA) - THQ
Conker: Live & Reloaded (Xbox) - MGS
Donkey Kong Country 3 (GBA) - Nintendo
Kameo: Elements of Power (Xbox 360) - MGS
Perfect Dark Zero (Xbox 360) - MGS

2006

Viva Piñata (Xbox 360) - MGS

2007

Diddy Kong Racing DS (NDS) - Nintendo
Jetpac Refuelled (Xbox Live Arcade) - MGS

Timeline

Rare has released over 120 titles in its illustrious career – far too many to comprehensively list here. Join us as we look back at both the good and the bad of Rare's impressive back catalogue



JETPAC [1983]
Spectrum, BBC, Vic 20
This, of course, is where it all began. One spaceman, three platforms, four chunks of spaceship, a horde of alien blobs and a never-ending quest for fuel. For all its simplicity, *Jetpac* is still compelling fun today and will probably still be in another 20 years time. Rare has recently released *Jetpac Refuelled* on Xbox Live Arcade. It features a new enhanced version, as well as the Spectrum original.



ATIC ATAC [1983]
Spectrum
Any Speccy gamer worth their salt should be able to close their eyes and instantly recall the tip-tap-tip-tap footsteps of your hero (Serf, Knight or Wizard?) and the hypnotic "falling down a trapdoor" animation. With a multi-level map, doors that required colour-coded keys and super-monsters like Dracula, the Wolfman and Frankenstein, all of who could only be repelled by certain items, *Atic Atac* may look prehistoric, but it was years ahead of its time.



PSSST [1983]
Spectrum
This is the sort of game that makes retro gamers go all misty-eyed. Not because of the game itself – a frantic blaster where you used various aerosols to defend a budding flower from ravenous bugs – was particularly memorable or innovative, but because it reminds us of a time when a game about a cute robot growing a flower was considered a mainstream proposition. The title also sounded a bit rude, which is always a bonus.

1983



COOKIE [1984]
Spectrum
A culinary variation on the *Pssst* format (with a little dash of *Burger Time* for good measure) this time casting you as a tiny hovering chef called Charlie, tasked with knocking ingredients into a bowl below. Things were complicated by the presence of no less than four dustbins right next to the bowl – which clearly contravenes every health and safety law in the land.



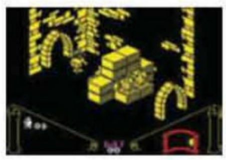
LUNAR JETMAN [1984]
Spectrum, BBC
The first Ultimate sequel, and the first 48K game from the team, found the hero of *Jetpac* upgrading his transport to a cool looking moon buggy. Unfortunately, blobby aliens were still pestering Jetman, and they also had an annoying habit of making craters on the moon's surface that his buggy couldn't cross. The idea was to drop little bridges into the holes and keep on truckin', but a lack of instructions and a fierce difficulty level left most people impressed – but frustrated.



SABRE WULF [1984]
Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC
Probably Ultimate's best remembered 2D offering, and the first to feature Ultimate's iconic packaging, *Sabre Wulf* oozed character and charm, though rose-tinted nostalgia has dulled some of the more clunky gameplay elements. Borrowing heavily from *Atic Atac's* maze set-up, *Sabre Wulf's* groovy jungle stylings were somewhat marred by the restrictive narrow corridors and a complete inability to defend against enemies coming from above and below.



UNDERWURLDE [1984]
Spectrum, C64
The sequel to *Sabre Wulf* found Sabreman swinging from ceilings and exploring caverns, though this time the difficulty went in completely the opposite direction – baddies no longer killed you, they just knocked you about. There's no denying that *Underwurlde* influenced games like *Nodes Of Yesod*, but it was the third Sabreman title that truly inspired a flood of imitators…



KNIGHT LORE [1984]
Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX
Released at the same time as *Underwurlde*, *Knight Lore* was the game that truly defined the Ultimate style; cementing its place as a key driver of the Speccy technology. The isometric 3D viewpoint allowed gamers to walk behind and in front of objects and, even though technically *Ant Attack* got there first, such freedom was still the stuff of a madman's fevered dreams. And yet here it was – in glorious duotone! Plus, of course, Sabreman transformed into a werewolf. C'mon, how cool was that?



ALIEN 8 [1984]
Spectrum, Amstrad, BBC, MSX
With the 3D viewpoint wowing gamers left, right and centre, Ultimate swiftly began making use of its new toy before anyone else could copy it. Gamers at the time moaned that *Alien 8* was little more than *Knight Lore* in space but most reviews agreed that it actually played slightly better and was the more enjoyable game.

1984-5



BLACKWHYCHE [1985]
C64
While Ultimate was very much a Speccy-centric company it did produce a few Commodore exclusives, though the development work was usually farmed out to external teams. Just as the Spectrum had Sabreman, the C64 crowd had Sir Arthur Pendragon who appeared in *Staff Of Karnath*, *Entombed* and this *Pirates Of The Caribbean*-esque romp, which proved to be his final outing. Opting for a more traditional side-on viewpoint and, lumbered with crude graphics and clumsy control, *Blackwyche* proved that Ultimate's passion lay very much on the other side of the great 8-bit divide.



NIGHTSHADE [1985]
Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, BBC, MSX
Introducing scrolling environments rather than the flip-screen layouts of old – and even experimenting with a splash of colour in the Speccy version – *Nightshade* found Ultimate offering some new ideas. These included buildings you could enter and the ability to rotate your viewpoint but the gameplay remained much the same as before and the environments seemed large and empty. Although it was well received, the general consensus was that Ultimate's cash cow technology was starting to lose its sheen.



GUNFRIGHT [1986]
Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX
The last Ultimate game before the rise of Rare, *Gunfright* applied the now familiar isometric template to a Western setting. More of a polish to the format than an innovation (though you had to pay for your bullets, which added a touch of strategy) reviews were positive – if a little weary of the formula.

1985-6



BUBBLER [1987]
Spectrum, Amstrad
Though produced under the Ultimate banner, the Stamper brothers had decamped to set up Rare by this point and Ultimate was being absorbed into US Gold, with the focus switching to budget re-releases of the classics rather than developing new products. This *Marble Madness* clone is indicative of the swansong days of the Ultimate brand – looks nice, plays well, but is, ultimately, lacking in personality.

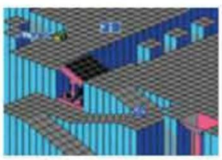


SLALOM [1987]
NES
Considering the adulation heaped on the developer in the British 8-bit market, Rare's first published game on the NES system was hardly an auspicious occasion, greeted with trumpet fanfares and buxom maidens riding on golden swans. No, it was this functional skiing sim – in which you trundle down slopes ranging from Snowy Peak to the self-explanatory Mount Nasty.



WHEEL OF FORTUNE [1988]
NES
Published by GameTek, this adaptation of the hit US quiz show illustrates the sort of mainstream product that Rare churned out in order to make its name on the console format. Rare also adapted Jeopardy! and, while these titles may not have earned them many cool points, they were huge smashes in the American market and showed that Rare could work wonders with licensed properties – something that would prove very useful.

1987-8



MARBLE MADNESS [1989]

NES

Rare's arcade experience and isometric 3D past made it the ideal choice to convert the popular ball-based skill game to the home consoles – ironic really, seeing as Ultimate's last post-Stamper gasp had been the similarly themed *Bubbler*. It's a great conversion and features some nifty music.



WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT? [1989]

NES

Certainly the biggest movie adaptation Rare had undertaken, the flip-screen adventuring of Roger Rabbit not only showed its ability to translate big screen action into solid gameplay in an era when the bland platform game was king, it also proved that it could find some interesting ways to make characters work on a console.

1 9 8 9



A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET [1990]

NES

Not the most obvious project for a console largely famous for cute adventures and wholesome fun but Rare nevertheless tried to fit Freddy Krueger into a Nintendo framework. It's not a bad little game, although it bears little resemblance to the movies – finding you leaping over snakes and dodging rocks while you search for Freddy.



SOLAR JETMAN [1990]

NES

Yes, Jetman appeared on the NES. Sounds weird, doesn't it? Like finding out that John Noakes was in an episode of *Cheers*. And yet there he is, heralded by the old Ultimate logo no less, floating around in full Nintendovision. Rare even used a cartoon image of him from the *Crash* cartoon strip on the title screen. Sadly, the game itself is really just a trumped-up version of *Thrust*, with Jetman himself only appearing if the ship is destroyed, but it's a playable variation on an old theme. Speccy and C64 versions were written but never released.



BATTLETOADS [1991]

NES, Game Boy

Shamelessly riding on the back of the Ninja Turtles craze, this gaming franchise nevertheless managed to squeeze out lots of sequels and spin-offs – with Rare in the driving seat. Nobody would ever rank *Battletoads* as one of the great games of all time but it's a solid little beat-'em-up, reasonably well known and a title that most people probably don't associate with Rare.

1 9 9 0 - 1



BATTLETOADS DOUBLE DRAGON [1993]

NES, SNES, Mega Drive, Game Boy

The ultimate team according to the title screen and, let's face it, apart from *Bad Dudes* meeting *Dragon Ninja*, was there ever a beat-'em-up crossover so loaded with potential as this one? The game itself? Not so great.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY [1994]

SNES

It's here that Rare really emerged from console anonymity and reclaimed its throne. A pivotal title in helping the SNES beat the Mega Drive, it also revived a dormant Nintendo mascot and delivered a still-classic platforming experience into the bargain. Loaded with superb level design and great graphics, this was clearly the work of people who knew the craftsmanship of games.



KILLER INSTINCT [1994]

Arcade

Once *Mortal Kombat* upped the stakes as far as in-game gore was concerned, all bets were off – and Rare was quick to serve up this gruesome fighter, plus sundry home versions and sequels. Packed with suitably outlandish characters, including a lycanthrope by the name of Sabrewulf, the series earned rave reviews and a devoted fanbase but it failed to have the long-term impact of Raiden and his friends.

1 9 9 2 - 4



GOLDENEYE [1997]

N64

Another new Nintendo console and another platform-defining game from Rare. While the first-person shooter genre had found a welcoming home on the mouse-and-keyboard PC setup, the popular wisdom was that such precise movement in a 3D environment was impossible on a console. *GoldenEye* proved them wrong – and how! Superb single-player, legendary multi-player and the introduction of dozens of features that are now standard across the genre. A true classic.



BLAST CORPS [1997]

N64

A welcome break from film tie-ins and remakes, *Blast Corps* found Rare flexing its creative muscles and coming up with a deliriously fun – and sadly underrated – little action gem. There's a runaway nuclear missile launcher and it'll blow up if it crashes. You clear a path through buildings and scenery using a variety of vehicles. Simple. Compelling. Ludicrously good fun.



DIDDY KONG RACING [1997]

N64

Rare

Although *Diddy Kong Racing* follows in the established tradition of *Super Mario Kart*, it's notable for two reasons. Firstly, thanks to Rare's proprietary Real-Time Dynamic Animation Technology graphics engine, it's a much better looking (and playing) game than *Mario Kart 64*. Secondly, it was the first title published by Nintendo under the Rare name, rather than Rare working as a behind-the-scenes developer for a third party.

Rare has recently released Diddy Kong Racing DS for Nintendo's popular handheld. Sadly, its new touchscreen elements sit poorly with the main game.

1 9 9 5 - 7



BANJO-KAZOOIE [1998]

N64

Rare tackled the cartoon platform genre once again and created another enduring franchise in the process. The team made it look so easy, didn't they? With Banjo the bear and Kazooie the bird combining their skills to solve puzzles and navigate the terrain, there's a certain circular serendipity to the idea of Rare borrowing the dual-character riff from Jon Ritman's *Head Over Heels*, which itself borrowed so heavily from Ultimate's 3D 8-bit games.



JET FORCE GEMINI [1999]

N64

Another unsung gem of Rare's N64 era, *Jet Force Gemini's* cute manga appearance masked a beast of a game – an enormous multi-faceted and flexible sci-fi shooter that combined the third-person exploration of *Banjo* with the sniping and blasting of *GoldenEye* to come up with a hybrid title that made a fan out of everyone who played it.



PERFECT DARK [2000]

N64, GBC

Room for one more classic before the next generation of consoles comes along? Sure, why not? The prospect of another FPS from the makers of *GoldenEye* was enough to get any red-blooded gamer hot under the collar and the end result was more than most dared wish for. A sleek, dark sci-fi thriller, packed with cool weapons, nail-biting stealth and an alien called Elvis, it's no surprise that the long-awaited prequel forms the backbone of the Xbox 360 launch line-up.

1 9 9 8 - 2 0 0 0



CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY [2001]

N64

Although *Conker* first made his debut in 1999 – in the Game Boy Color title *Conker's Pocket Adventure* – it took the power of the N64 to bring him to true foul-mouthed life. A sweary, leering squirrel, *Conker* allowed Rare to lovingly spoof all the clichés of the platform genre – many of which they'd helped create. Juvenile and silly, it was a fitting capstone to the company's 64-bit phase.

POST 2001?

The day after *Starfox Adventures* – Rare's first and last GameCube game – was released, Microsoft revealed that it had bought the talented Twycross-based developers for a cool $350 million.

Early titles such as *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, *Banjo Pilot* and *It's Mr Pants* on the Xbox and Game Boy Advance didn't really impress and many felt that Rare was on the wane.

Luckily, while the 360's *Perfect Dark Zero* was a disappointment, both *Kameo: Elements of Power*, *Viva Piñata* and the upcoming *Banjo Kazooie* suggest that Rare is getting its form back.



2 0 0 1 +

THE MAKING OF...

TURRICAN

Created in 1990, Manfred Trenz's Turrican remains a benchmark shooter that perfectly combines both platform and shoot-'em-up elements to create a thoroughly absorbing title. Eager to learn more about the landmark C64 shooter, Darran Jones decided to track down and talk to Trenz himself





Looking at these magnificent screenshots, it's hard to imagine that *Turrican* was running on a humble Commodore 64

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** RAINBOW ARTS
» **DEVELOPER:** MANFRED TRENZ
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** RUN 'N' GUN
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+



Ask any Commodore 64 owner to name their top five favourite videogames and you can guarantee that *Turrican* will be on the shortlist.

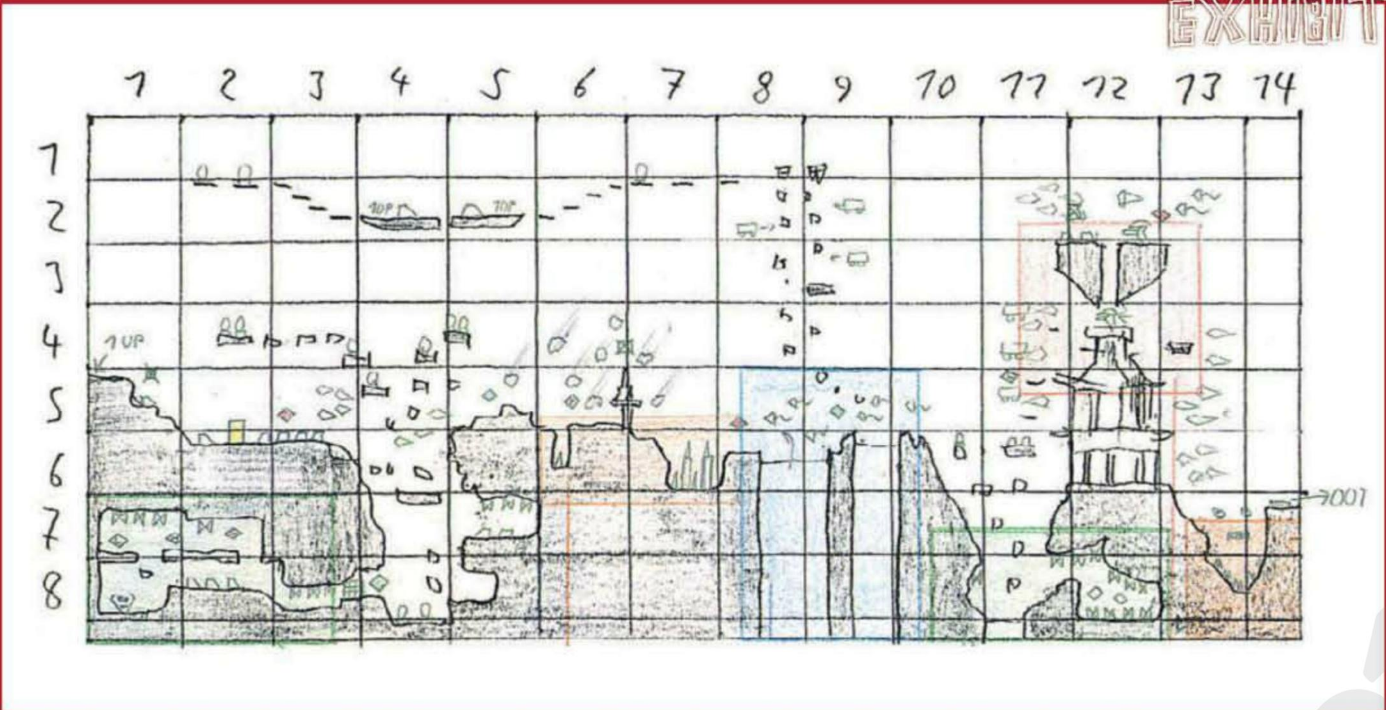
Released for the Commodore 64 in 1990 it was an immediate hit with critics and public alike thanks to its outrageously good visuals, outstanding sound and challenging gameplay – not bad for someone who'd only been in the industry for four years.

"I remember entering a graphic competition in 1986 for a German magazine called *64'er*," explains Trenz, recalling his lucky break. I sent in some of my artwork and ended up coming third, which in my mind, was pretty good." Trenz had been initially introduced to the Vic20 in 1984 and had been so impressed by it that he eventually picked up a Commodore 64. Before long he started dabbling around in Basic and eventually created a simple single-screen shooter where you took control of a helicopter. Frustrated with the lack of speed that Basic provided, the resourceful Trenz soon taught himself Assembly and started creating all sorts of short demos to impress his friends with.

While Trenz only managed to attain third place in the *64'er* competition his talent hadn't

» Trenz was a stickler to detail and he painstakingly drew each level by hand, before actually designing it. Here's just some of his handiwork…

EXHIBIT 1



"LIKE KATAKIS BEFORE IT I CAME UP WITH THE NAME BY SIMPLY FLICKING THROUGH THE LOCAL TELEPHONE DIRECTORY AND LANDING ON THE PRIVATE HOME NUMBER OF AN ITALIAN NAMED TURRICANO"

gone unnoticed. A small company called Rainbow Arts had been impressed with his entries and soon got into contact with the talented artist. "They asked me to do some graphics for their games, so I initially started working for them on a freelance basis," continues Trenz. "By 1987 I was asked to join the company on a permanent basis as its graphics artist; I readily agreed. Although at that time Rainbow Arts didn't realise I was a coder as well! My first in-house project was the wonderful *The Great Giana Sisters*, a title which I created the graphics and level design for."

Essentially a computer version of Nintendo's NES hit *Super Mario Bros*, *The Great Giana Sisters* managed to stay on the shelves for one week before Nintendo's lawyers had it pulled (much to the detriment of fans everywhere who claim it to be the better game). Trenz's next project, however, not only remained on shelves, it defined his career, shot Rainbow Arts into the limelight and is still played by many gamers today.

While *Turrican* felt like a breath of fresh air on Commodore's 8-bit machine, it wasn't exactly a new concept – indeed, Trenz had borrowed ideas from a myriad of different titles, the most obscure being an old Data East arcade game that Trenz had been addicted to at his local Düsseldorf arcade. "I adored *Psycho-Nics-Oscar* as it had several new features that I'd never seen in a game before," explains Trenz. "It featured a heavily armoured hero that was jumping around and throwing around lots of weapons. At the time, nothing like it existed for the C64, so I decided to use it as the basis for what would eventually become *Turrican*. Even *Turrican's* name was 'borrowed' – "like *Katakis* before it I came up with the name by simply flicking through the local telephone directory and landing on the private home number of an Italian named Turricano."

With all his ideas firmly in place, Trenz locked himself away and set to work; his goal was simple – create an 8-way, smoothly scrolling masterpiece. Although, to be fair, *Turrican* was far from a solo effort. "It took me around nine full months to complete the C64 version," confirms Trenz. "I took care of all the graphics, design and coding, Chris Huelsbeck and Ramiro Vaca handled the music, while Adam Bulka was in charge of the game's sound effects." Considering the sheer scale of Trenz's ambition it was hardly surprising that *Hurrican*'s (as it was originally known) development was a less than smooth process… "Creating *Turrican* certainly wasn't easy," confirms Trenz. "One of the biggest problems I encountered was the scrolling. I had to scroll all these colourful graphics in all directions without compromising the power of the CPU. I've no idea if what I was doing was the same as other coders, but when I did hit a snag, I always seemed to find a way to solve it."

And solve them he did; *Turrican* was graphically amazing and pulled off all sort of tricks that many thought were too difficult to achieve on the humble C64 – it was the first actual Commodore 64 title to feature 'true' parallax scrolling – and became an instant showpiece for when your less fortunate Spectrum and Amstrad owning mates turned up. *Turrican* was definitely a game to impress your mates with but, considering the sheer amount of effort Trenz had invested in it, it was never going to be anything less. Aware of his deadlines, Trenz had already created several graphics tools and had religiously played several titles to ensure that creating *Turrican's* applauded visuals caused as few problems as possible.



THEY SAID:

"ALL IN ALL, A HUGE GAME WHICH IS RECOMMENDED FOR ANYONE WANTING A TOP-NOTCH ARCADE BLAST"
ZZAP!64

THE MAKING OF... TURRICAN



"I'VE LOST COUNT OF THE NUMEROUS REQUESTS TO REMAKE TURRICAN, ALTHOUGH UNFORTUNATELY, THE RIGHTS FOR THE GAME ARE NOW IN THE WRONG HANDS"

SO MANY SYSTEMS, SO LITTLE TIME

Such was the success of *Turrican* that it soon appeared on a variety of different computers and consoles, with the Super NES version being particularly enjoyable to play through. Interestingly, though, Trenz had hardly any involvement with most of the different conversions that existed and only actually worked on the C64, Amiga and NES versions of the game. "The only console version I ever actually worked on was *Super Turrican* for the NES," he explains. "Although if I'm totally honest about it, I was far from satisfied with the end product. Mainly because it lacked many of the gameplay elements of the earlier versions and didn't feature the same degree of difficulty. Unfortunately, development time was short and it had to be finished on time, so there was little I could do. The other versions, such as the SNES and Mega Drive games had nothing to do with me.



» There were plenty of obstacles to clear in *Turrican*, with many being just as dangerous as the enemies you faced

"Being able to create the graphics from my own tools was great," admits Trenz, "and enabled me to get some great results from the old C64. I was also impressed with the way that other games at the time were using additional colour information for 8X8 blocks, as it made a huge difference to the way they eventually looked. As for the actual level design, well it initially all started off with me designing them on paper. I still have the original copies," he proudly proclaims. "Once I had the basic design in place, I simply added everything else. As with the graphics, I created a special level editor to create each stage, as well as an objects editor for taking care of the *Turrican's* many enemies. If I'm totally honest, it was more fun than work to create the actual levels."

While much of *Turrican's* graphical look and level design came from Trenz's own imagination, he does admit to using several elements from the aforementioned *Psycho-Niks-Oscar* and Nintendo's excellent *Metroid*. *Turrican* certainly shares plenty of traits with Samus' first adventure, but where the bounty hunter had to make do with some fairly mundane-looking weapons, the power-ups that were available in *Turrican* were of a much greater calibre.

Few C64 owners will forget the delight of creating huge destructive waves of electricity with *Turrican's* amazing Lightning gun, but Trenz had even more exciting weapons planned, he just couldn't put them all in… "I had so many more great weapons in mind but the limitations of the C64 made it impossible to make them all a reality. For example, there was this great full screen laserbeam, but it proved to be too much for the Commodore 64 to handle. The weapons you see in the final game are as good as could be for their time, though. Even with the above restrictions, *Turrican's* weapons were still a joy to use (and look at) and then you have those amazing bosses to use them on…

From the gigantic Piranha that spat out tinier fish to the huge metallic gauntlet, each and every boss looked fantastic and had the ability to dish out tremendous amounts of damage to your one-man army. Just like the game's outstanding visuals however, creating these impressive behemoths was, unsurprisingly, far from straightforward… "Ah the bosses. They proved to be quite an issue at first," begins Trenz. "Because they were built out of so many sprites and multiplexed together avoiding flicker proved to be quite a problem for me. Still, I'd always been impressed with huge bosses in the many arcade games I had played, so I was desperate to include them in *Turrican* and, although many were my own creations, some were inspired by movies and other games. Take the metal fist for example; the idea originally came from *Yellow Submarine*. There's a scene in the movie when the Blue Meanies prepare to attack Pepperland with a huge blue fist. There's plenty more secrets I could share with you, but I'll save them for another time…"

Secrets aside, Trenz found numerous ways to solve most of the obstacles he encountered and when *Turrican* was eventually released, it immediately began earning rave reviews from everyone who was lucky enough to play it. Although Trenz himself admits to being totally surprised with the game's reception. "I really didn't expect it at all," he told us. Nevertheless, *Turrican* became an instant hit and an Amiga port (which had been started at the same time as the C64 game) quickly followed. Despite the higher hardware specifications, Trenz and the rest of the Amiga design team still encountered several problems… "The



» *Turrican* may have been a tough game, but there was plenty of replay value to it

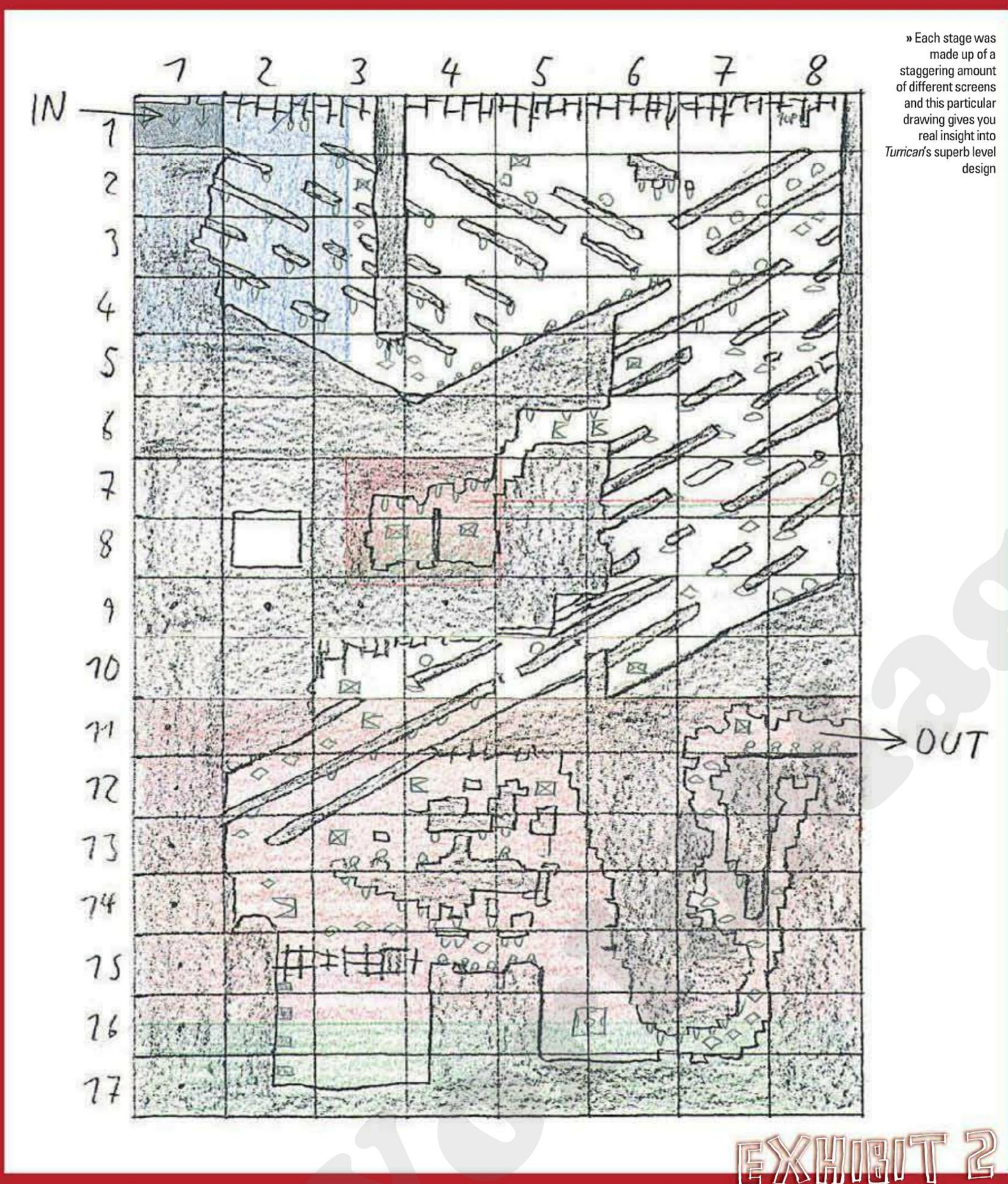


scrolling was the obvious difficulty," confirms Trenz. "Mainly because all the graphics had to be redrawn into bitmaps instead of tiles and had to be scrolled smoothly without stressing the CPU too much. Thanks to the impressive talents of programmer Holger Schmidt, everything ended up working perfectly."

With the game being so well received, an inevitable sequel was soon requested. "There was a huge pressure on me, as the sequel had to be so much better," continues Trenz. "So many people had such high expectations for it. It wasn't easy but I was eventually satisfied with the end results." He certainly must have been pleased with the end result as Trenz cites the C64 version of *Turrican 2* as his favourite game in the series. "It has all the great elements of the original game, great flying sections that are similar to *Katakis* and, of course, much better weapons." Despite his obvious love for the sequel, Trenz still holds a special torch for the game that gave him worldwide acclaim and is impressed with its endurance. "Even today people are regularly writing to me to say that they still play the game. I've also lost count of the numerous requests to remake it, although unfortunately, the rights for the game are now in the wrong hands. Still, it's certainly a great feeling to have created a title that's considered by many as a milestone in the history of videogames."



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES: *Turrican 2: The Final Fight, Turrican 3, Super Turrican, Turrican 3D* (cancelled), *Universal Soldier*



» Each stage was made up of a staggering amount of different screens and this particular drawing gives you real insight into *Turrican*'s superb level design

IF I COULD MAKE A NEW TURRICAN GAME...

"I think there's definitely room in the marketplace for a *Turrican* game today," begins Trenz when we started talking about resurrecting the franchise. "It's important to remember that *Turrican's* magic came from the classical 2D view. Putting it into the third dimension would change the game too much and it wouldn't be the same. I know what I'm talking about, believe me."

Indeed, Trenz began work on a 3D version of *Turrican* in 2000 but the project was scrapped. Factor 5 (formed from the remnants of Rainbow Arts) has also tried on several attempts to bring the franchise up to date, but its *Thornado* project is now a distant memory. Despite this, Trenz feels that a *Turrican* game could still work.

"A good platform for a *Turrican* game would be the Game Boy Advance or Nintendo DS. Of course, changes and design enhancements would need to be made in design and gameplay in order to meet today's requirements. One example would be a co-operative mode using the wireless technique on the DS to fight together against evil, although to be truthful the possibilities are endless."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KATAKIS
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1988

R-TYPE
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1988

TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT
SYSTEMS: C64, AMIGA
YEAR: 1991



CASTLE OF ILLUSION

SCREW FANTASIA, HERE'S THE REAL DEAL



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+

HISTORY



It's always managed to amaze me that Sega was able to create this wonderful little platformer, only to get it so horribly wrong with the release of the dreadfully poor *Fantasia* just a short year later.

Despite arriving early on in the console's life, it's quite astonishing to realise that Mickey's very first Mega Drive outing remains one of the greatest platformers ever to appear on the 16-bit console.

Just look at this screenshot. Back in 1990 this was cutting edge stuff and even today it manages to hold its own against more recent platformers. Mickey is a masterpiece in sprite design and while his animation routines now look a little ropey, he's still filled with more charm and character than a dozen Ratchet and Clanks. Indeed, when *Castle Of Illusion* first appeared it was so impressive that you could have sworn you were taking part in an interactive cartoon, such was its beauty.

Outstanding graphics told only half the story, as, with saccharine soundtrack in tow, *Castle Of Illusion* presented you with some of the finest level design around. Granted it wasn't a tough game to complete but the beautifully crafted stages ensured that you wanted to return to them again and again and again. But then, Sega had crammed so much variety into each and every stage that you just had to revisit them – if only so you could take everything in.

For example, one minute you were being chased down a hill by a huge apple, the next you were leaping into a giant's cup of tea and swimming around in the hot brew. Later stages saw you swinging from light switches, taking massive leaps of faith over immense holes and daintily stepping past cute spiders while making your way through the cobweb-infested level that we've shown here.

Crikey, we've run out of space and haven't even had a chance to cover *Castle Of Illusion*'s many spectacular bosses. Just take our word for it that they are as challenging as they are inventive. Enough already, just play the damn thing and wash away those *Fantasia* memories forever.





SEGA MEGA DRIVE

THE MEGA DRIVE WAS SEGA'S FIRST SUCCESSFUL CONSOLE. SOME ARGUE IT WAS ALSO ITS LAST, HAILING A BELLEROPHON STYLED RISE AND FALL. IT REPRESENTS SO MANY THINGS, TO SO MANY PEOPLE, FOR SO MANY REASONS. JOHN SZCZEPANIAK TRIES TO CAPTURE SOME ESSENCE OF WHAT IT ALL MEANT...





Modem Wars
Sega dabbled in modem usage for the Mega Drive. Nagumo-san explained, "It was called Mega-Modem, whose sales date was November 3, 1990. It is a modem unit for Mega Drive that enabled online game communication. It used analogue lines and its connection speed was 1,200bps. The service named 'Game Toshokan' enabled downloading of games, delivery of Sega-related news and online matches." Records vary wildly on how many games utilised online play (one source stating six). We only found solid confirmation regarding *Tel Tel Mahjong* and *Stadium* titles. More interestingly was the '*Game Toshokan*', which allowed downloading of games like *Phantasy Star* text adventures, *Pyramid Magic* and *Flicky* to a special cartridge. Closing in 1993, fans worried the online-only games would be forever lost. Luckily in 1994 there were two Mega-CD compilations, *Sega Games Can Vol 1* and *2*, which included nearly all available titles. Prized among *Phantasy Star* collectors, these are incredibly rare.



Nintendo's fate has often been intertwined with the Mega Drive system. It has long had a history of benefiting from Sega in one form or another, often due to the direct competitive challenge it posed. The SNES would have been nothing without the MD; the reverse is also true. It was the Mega Drive that pushed Nintendo's into updating its aged NES hardware and it was also the Mega Drive that changed the market forever, cutting a trail towards the situation today. It is undeniably one of the most important pieces of hardware in gaming history. So it should have come as no surprise to find that MD games decided to support Nintendo's recently released Wii system. In a moment of irony, it must be noted that Sega had already dabbled in downloadable MD games with The Sega Channel, making its announcement quite apt. The decision was obvious. Later Sega systems would prove difficult, technically, and also the MD was far more successful than the Master System. As will be shown, the MD can be credited for many things – it was a magical high Sega never again reached.

The Japanese debut was 29 October, 1988. The widespread American release was less than a year later in 1989, while the United Kingdom had to wait roughly another year before it arrived in November 1990. To fully understand the importance of the Mega Drive's launch, you need to know what the international climate was like during the decadent Eighties.

Sega had already entered the console fray previously, with the successive releases of its SG-1000 Mark I, II and III systems in Japan (1981-1985), the 3rd model of which was redesigned as the Master System for Western countries. To be blrutally honest, despite it being technically superior to the Famicom/NES, it was a commercial failure that never gained more than a five per cent market share. Only in Brazil was it able to officially eclipse Nintendo's 8-bit hardware. Throughout the mid-to-late Eighties, Japan's console market was controlled almost entirely by the Famicom, which was unbelievably popular. America was gripped by the NES, again with near total market dominance. The NES was also available in Europe and the UK, though Britannia was more enamoured with 8-bit micros than high-priced consoles.

In 1987 Hudson Soft and NEC jointly released the PC-Engine against the Famicom, two years later redesigning and releasing it in America as the TurboGrafx 16. When Sega decided to position its MD as a third competitor, the odds must have seemed impossibly high. According to David Sheff, Hiroshi Yamauchi dismissed Sega as not being a threat. Yamauchi was more concerned with NEC, which was investing roughly $3.7 billion into R&D, an amount greater than Nintendo's then annual sales. Sega, meanwhile, was only a $700 million company and one founded by an American. As an underdog scrapping against NEC for second place, Sega and its MD was

Year Released: Japan: 1988 USA: 1989 UK: 1990

Original Price: Japan: 21,000 Yen USA: $189.99 UK: £189.99

Buy it now for: £10+ with games

Associated Magazines: Beep! Megadrive, Mega Drive Fan, GameFan, Mean Machines, Sega Visions Magazine

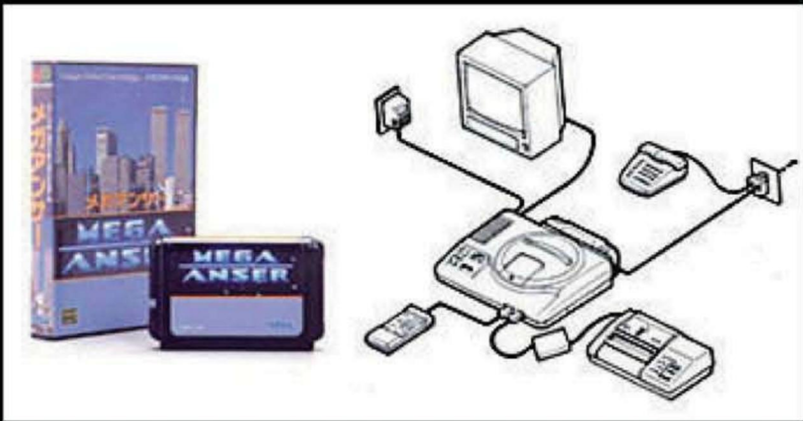
Why the Mega Drive was great… The Mega Drive ushered in the 16-bit era; some say the last golden era of gaming. It was a special kind of scene to be a part of. No explanation, no mix of words or screenshots or memories can ever touch that sense of knowing that you were there, playing those great games during that point in time. Though this age has sadly passed, newcomers still need to understand.







SEGA MEGA DRIVE





» **Above and right:** For ultimate collectors and those wanting to use the Mega Drive for online banking: the Sega Mega Anser (sic)

"ATARI WAS OFFERED THE GENESIS AND JACK TRAMIEL TURNED IT DOWN. JACK THOUGHT THE DEAL WAS TOO EXPENSIVE" MICHAEL KATZ



Hybrid Children

A sign of the Mega Drive's popularity is the number of variations that exist. Beyond your standard models, there was the JVC Wondermega (Xeye in America), which combined MD and Mega-CD. Then there was the much smaller combined Multi-Mega (CDX in America), doubling as a portable CD player. Following this musical theme, there was the Aiwa CSD-GM1, combining the MD/MCD with a portable "Boom Box" radio. From CD to LD, Sega's champion was also included with Pioneer's Laseractive. MSX fans will be interested to know it was integrated into the AX-330 and AX-990 models, for Arabic distribution in Kuiwait and Yemen. Computer implementation didn't end there, since it was also hybridised into the Sega TeraDrive, a Japanese home computer. Meanwhile, the Western equivalent was the Amstrad Mega PC. Then there was the portable Nomad, and the Mega Jet, which was used by Japan Airlines. And, of course, the above doesn't even take into account the many bootleg clones about!



underestimated, viewed by the industry itself as the weaker of the two. Retro Gamer spoke with Mr Nagumo, the team manager of SOJ CS Product PR, and asked many, many questions, few of them answered. When asked if, due to the impossible odds stacked against them, Sega had considered becoming a developer for either the Famicom or PC Engine, his answer was blunt. "No, we didn't."

Even so, Sega staff were curious about the Famicom. In two separate interviews (*GameWeek* and *TNL*) Yuji Naka admitted to making Famicom games run on the MD. His comments, amalgamated, were, "Oh my. [laughs] How do you people know about that one? Well yeah, actually I did. I once made a Famicom emulator for the Mega Drive. It was something fun to amuse myself with at the time. I couldn't play every game with it. But it was fun to call people over and show them Mario running around on a Mega Drive."

ORIGINS OF GENESIS

Sega's main source of profit during the Eighties was its hugely popular arcade games, like Yu Suzuki's *Space Harrier* and *Hang On*. To beat the competition, the head of Sega, Hayao Nakayama, decided to create the first true arcade home system. He worked in secret with Hideki Sato, modifying Sega's System-16 hardware – the same hardware that powered arcade versions of *Shinobi* and *Altered Beast*. This would have allowed superior visuals and audio, leagues ahead of the competition. It would also allow for easier, more accurate arcade ports (which gamers would be familiar with), and therefore plenty of games.

The new console had to be scaled down from the System-16, in terms of processor speed and available on-screen colours but Hideki Sato planned ahead and included some extras. It was backwards-compatible with the Master System (using the Power Base Converter) and it was also designed with the future potential to use a mouse, keyboard, 2-inch floppy disk drive, modem, graphics tablet and printer. He even considered the possibility of someday attaching a CD drive.

Beep!, a multiformat Japanese mag, first announced the system in June 1988 alongside an early prototype drawing, tentatively calling it the Sega Mark V (following on from previous names). The internal project meanwhile was called Mk-1601 but Sega wanted something stronger for the launch. It went through 300 different proposals, before finally settling on Mega Drive.

Disappointingly, the Japanese launch was very understated. Their penchant for lengthy, mind-boggling queuing in Akihabara had been forgotten; there were no such queues for the MD! Supply and publicity had been well organised but the machine was overshadowed by *Super Mario Bros. 3*, released just one week earlier. Luckily, magazines



» Most Mega Jets being sold come from an initial shipment hijacked by Indonesian sea-pirates. Their distribution was organised by underground collectors



» A young Hideki Sato working on a prototype Mega Drive; he was the main designer behind it





» There are countless unlicensed Chinese (and Korean) games, like *Barver Battle Saga – The Space Fighter*. It was renamed *Final Fantasy* when translated into Russian



» Above and below: By using the Power Base Converter, the Mega Drive could play Sega's back-catalogue of Master System games



like *Famitsu* and *Beep!* gave it positive coverage, and so a small but loyal following began. Reportedly 400,000 units were shipped in the first year.

Despite the low uptake in Japan, Sega went on to pursue highly risky and quite odd endeavours – bad for profits, great for collectors. Along with a gaming modem (see boxout on page 56), Sega created an online banking system for Nagoya Bank. The result was the Mega Anser (sic), complete with modem, numerical keypad and grossly overpriced 'Mega Printer'. Sega also adapted the MD for arcade use, despite it already being based on the System-16 architecture. The results were the System C-2 board and also the timed MegaTech and then MegaPlay systems; roughly, these three had a combined total of 80 games developed. Japan also received the rarest version of *Tetris* ever and some sublime exclusive RPGs like *Rent-A-Hero* and *King Colossus* (both fan-translated).

But Japan was never what the Mega Drive was about. Success lay in the USA and Europe. Sega had the fight of its life ahead, and it would take not only gutsy determination to succeed, but also a damned excellent roster of games, and luck. Sega clearly had just enough of these, since it nearly conquered the industry.

GLOBALLY GAMED

To bolster the inside information available to Retro Gamer, Ken Horowitz of Sega-16.com kindly donated interviews he conducted with industry figures. One such individual was Michael Katz, former head of Sega's American branch, who presided over the Genesis's initial sales year. Katz explained the early days: "I arrived one month after Genesis launched. The company was small (under 50 people). They had gone through two to three Presidents (Gene Lipkin, Bruce Lowery) in the "Master System" days. Dave Rosen – vice chairman of Sega (and original founder), was overseeing the running of the company. I reported to him and Nakayama in Japan. Sega was basically a distribution company in the US. Hardware and software development came from Japan. I initially had to deal with keeping employees happy, determining the quality of the staff and getting into the job of building the Sega versus Nintendo juggernaut." Arriving after the American launch, Katz wasn't aware of the details surrounding the name change from Mega Drive to Genesis. Consensus states it was due to a trademark dispute. The facts are blurred but point possibly to a US manufacturer of storage devices called Mega Drive Systems Inc.

We also questioned Katz ourselves and he revealed a fascinating anecdote from before the Genesis launch. "I will tell you that Atari was offered the Genesis (when I was president of Atari Games Division) and Jack Tramiel turned it down. It would have gotten Atari back in the game with a 16-bit system. I attended the meeting at Atari, when Dave Rosen (Sega Chairman) visited us (Jack and I) and made the offer. Jack thought the deal was too expensive and he was more interested in the Atari ST computer project." The system filtering into America and Europe raises an important question for importers. Why the deplorable need for regional lockout? Katz admitted he had no control over it in America: "Lockout decisions were made in Japan. The Sega Japan International VP handled international sales and marketing." Never knowing when to quit, Retro Gamer pushed Japan's PR man into a corner until he commented. As Nagumo puts it, "We implemented the security regionally to prevent game software being imported due to gaps of sales time between regions." As he wipes the sweat from his brow, we jovially comment that thankfully it wasn't successful. Enterprising young hackers soon bypassed the security with special contraptions and later, easy methods for modifying the hardware were devised.



» The rarest most expensive version of *Tetris*. Ever. You need underground contacts and plenty of money to join this elite 'owners club'

IF FORCED TO SUMMARISE WHY THE MD IS SUCH A BLOODY FANTASTIC SLAB OF BLACK PLASTIC, IT'S BECAUSE IT'S ALL THINGS TO ALL GAMERS



SEGA MEGA DRIVE



Channel Control
The Mega Drive has so many unusual anecdotes you need a hundred box-outs like this. With downloadable MD games now available for the Wii, we've decided to highlight the revolutionary Sega Channel.

Speaking with Nagumo-san again, we hoped for a pride-filled statement that championed this pioneering achievement. His answer was somewhat subdued, "It was a cable television service in the US from which videogames could be downloaded. We started the service in co-operation with Telecommunications, Inc. One could play his favourite games as much as he liked at a fixed amount every month. We also had the same services in co-operation with regional cable televisions in Japan."

From 1993 games were made available for download (divided by genre), at a cost of $12.95 per month. Games were rotated every few weeks, encompassing nearly the entire library, plus a few unreleased titles and imports! They could be played indefinitely, but lasted only while the system was turned on.



» With an unprecedented comic book styling, *Comix Zone* was one of many exclusive titles that made the MD worth owning. An astoundingly good brawler

IT WAS A SYSTEM WHERE THE ALLURE WAS BORN NOT ONLY OF THE HARDWARE AND GAMES, BUT THE MAGAZINES, PLAYGROUND ARGUMENTS, CLIMATE AND POLITICS OF THE TIME

Underground importing certainly didn't harm international sales. The MD is officially Sega's highest selling system. International figures are estimated to be between 30 and 35 million units, of which only ten per cent is attributed to Japan. Sega was determined to achieve those higher sales abroad; it demanded the American branch chant the Japanese word "HYAKUMANDAI" (that's "one-million" in English), in order to encourage sales. Katz elaborated, "The 'one million units' chant was representative of a goal set by Sega Japan. Did they just pluck the number out of thin air? I don't know. I think they thought that if we sold a million units in the first year that would make a big statement. They disregarded Nintendo's position and the fact that all key retailers would have to come on board immediately to hit the number, and also the need for a substantial software library from the get-go." Despite the daily chanting, sales only reached halfway. Katz went on, "We sold about 500K units — which I considered damn good — because Genesis was new, didn't have a large software library initially, and the Nintendo franchise was hard to crack."

In America it seemed Nintendo was unstoppable, and that was indeed its intention. It used some very unorthodox methods to maintain superiority. Stores were bullied into not carrying Sega products and developers were forced to sign strict licensing agreements stating they'd only develop for Nintendo. But everyone loves seeing a tyrant deposed and a colossus fall, and so various developers began thinking of the Mega Drive as a serious, more profitable alternative. Popular companies like Namco changed allegiance, while EA reverse-engineered the system before developing high quality exclusives. This all helped make Sega a tempting alternative for consumers.

However, as Katz explained, Sega wasn't too pleased with EA. "Sega was unhappy about EA reverse-engineering Genesis. We were in the process of giving EA/Trip a 'sweetheart' deal, then we needed a *Joe Montana* game in a hurry (the game being developed for us by Media Genic was way behind schedule), so I asked Trip for a back-up *Madden* football game. He gave us one and that assured him a low/royalty-free deal on Genesis software. The first *Montana* game being a '*Madden* back up' from EA is a little-known fact."

The MD's huge success came with the arrival of *Sonic The Hedgehog*, a phenomenal mascot that endures to this day. However, the question that has to be asked is what if *Sonic* had not been a hit and never had the success that it did? When asked, Nagumo playfully hinted at the possibility that Sega had other titles, besides *Sonic*, with which to take on Nintendo and *Mario*. "We had the marketing and promotion strategies using various titles at that time. *Sonic* was one of them that led to a big hit." Katz saw things differently. When asked about SOA's initial dislike of the Sonic character, he said, "I certainly underestimated the potential of *Sonic*. Thank God there was good and sustained gameplay (critical in any game success). I know that I thought it was nuts, when we were going for targeted and widespread awareness in everything we did, for the Japanese to develop a game based on a type of character — a hedgehog — that no kid in the American 6-16 year-old demographic would have any familiarity with. We knew we needed a great "character action" game to put in the line-up. We were hoping for a *Donkey Kong* type hit. When *Sonic* was so hot, it was decided to bundle it with Genesis (just as ColecoVision was bundled with *Donkey Kong* in 1981). If Sega didn't have *Sonic*, Genesis sales would probably have been less, but it's hard to say. I don't know if Sega Japan had a back-up – I think not. Sega Japan was responsible for developing the character action genre. We were responsible in the US for developing sports games."

Despite his great effort and success in the early years, Katz was replaced by Tom Kalinske in 1990. Most agree that any successes were a result of combined team efforts, but that Katz is often unfairly overlooked. In past interviews, Kalinske explained how *Sonic* became the pack-in title. "After my first month as CEO, I told Mr Nakayama, 'You have to get rid of *Altered Beast*, the title that's bundled with Genesis. It sounds like devil worship. We have to get the price down to $149 and we have to develop more American software.' The board spoke for two hours in Japanese and I was just sitting there, not



» Japan's *Hyper Exciting Visual Game Magazine – Mega Drive Fan* was one of several dedicated publications





» **Top and bottom:** The anime influenced *Phantasy Star* series reached its peak with number 4. Few RPGs even come close to such magnificence



» **Above and below:** Smooth like liquid napalm, *Ranger X* by Gau Entertainment is a frenetic blaster, with audio and visuals that'd melt the brain of those unaccustomed to such splendour



understanding a word. Finally Mr Nakayama said, 'No one here agrees with anything you've said.' I thought mine was going to be the shortest career in the business. But as I was walking out, he said, 'But I hired you to make the decisions for Europe and the Americas, so go ahead and do it.'"

Sega eventually annihilated the TurboGrafx 16, and it was doing well against the NES, but the sleeping giant had awakened and in 1990 Nintendo launched the SNES. The ultimate grudge match began, which, even today, remains fresh in people's hearts and minds. Nintendo had on its side Japanese stalwarts Square and Enix, which made Sega's conquest of Japan nigh-on impossible but it had already proven itself to be hip and cool in the West, and this is where it succeeded. Sega was out earlier, priced cheaply and provided both what people wanted and what its rivals weren't supplying.

Everyone deep down knew the MD couldn't outperform the SNES; it was the underdog in terms of graphical and audio power (it had a faster processor though). Developers had to work harder to get great results. This extra effort, and dare it be said, love, that went into the games, was very apparent – when they came up with a graphical trick, or something unique, it showed. The Genesis had more mature software and was also advertised on adult TV like *Saturday Night Live*, further cementing its reputation as "doing what Nintendon't." But the big tipping of the scales was *Mortal Kombat*. Sega's version had blood and included all arcade fatalities; Nintendo's version didn't. The atmosphere at the time was electric, and *Mortal Kombat* was a deciding factor for many people's purchases.

By 1992, Sega had 55 per cent control of the market (up from around 8 per cent), and by 1993 it had more than quadrupled its net worth (up to $3.6 billion). Sega had reached its peak and over the coming years it became like a leper, withering as its valuable bits fell off. The golden era ended, but if you look with the right kind of eyes, you can almost see the high water mark, where that glorious wave broke and finally rolled back.

If forced to summarise why the MD is such a bloody fantastic slab of black plastic, it's because it's all things to all gamers. It appealed to hardcore elitist collectors, since it was great to import for – there were plenty of action games (like *Alien Soldier*, and the explosively magnificent *Ranger X*), with sturdy boxes protecting beautiful Japanese cover-art. When SNES-owning friends had updates of Konami classics like *Contra* and *Castlevania*, MD owners were blessed with their own updates. They were not mere ports but were designed from scratch, taking into account the hardware's limitations – and they were all the better because of this. There was no relying on vast colours or a custom Sony music chip; the gameplay had to be strong.

Importantly, it tapped in the mass market and appealed to families with low incomes. In impoverished areas in the USA it was popular among Black and Hispanic youths, who enjoyed the affordable easy-to-play arcade thrills provided. Children were also catered for, with both licensed and new IPs (*Quackshot* and *Toejam & Earl*). When the kids were tranquilised and asleep in bed, parents could indulge in a plethora of sports titles (*Madden* and so on), violent brawlers (*Cyborg Justice*) or cerebral games like *Ecco*.

It was a system where much of the atmosphere and allure was born not only of the hardware and games, but the magazines, playground arguments, climate and politics of the time. One of the most notable American magazines covering the system was *GameFan*, which, despite being multiformat, loved the Genesis. Its founder, Dave Halverson, understood, appreciated and helped generate a lot buzz for Treasure too. *GameFan* praised their games, rightfully hyped up *Gunstar Heroes* to encourage sales and were one of the very first English language magazines to conduct an interview with Treasure. Of course, not every multiformat magazine had quite the same views, which is why *Edge* infamously only gave *Gunstar Heroes* a half-page 6 out of 10 review. If you were an MD fan back in the early 1990s, Halverson's *GameFan* was the magazine you wanted to be reading!

We've not even yet mentioned subjects like the VR headset, Menacer Gun, Activator peripheral, *Virtua Racing*'s 3D graphics, pirate flash carts, Brazilian rock band Megadriver, Boris Vallejo or the million-and-one related subjects. But it doesn't matter. Experiencing the system will tell you more than these words ever could.









» **Top and bottom:** *El Viento* and *Alisia Dragoon* are two very similar, very fun, and very Japanesey action-platformers

» **Top and bottom**: Konami knew how to love MD owners: Insane hyper-exaggerated action in *Contra*, and classic vampire hunting in *Castlevania*



» Every kid wants to rip his best friend's spine out. The uncensored Sega version shifted the tides between MD and SNES popularity

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Many special thanks to www.sega-16.com, the best unofficial Mega Drive site online, for donating interview segments and images. Visit them for the full interviews! Thanks also to www.segagagadomain.com for images, Michael Katz for answering additional questions, and Sega's Stefan McGarry.







» There was certainly no shortage of exclusive, epic, and utterly essential action-RPGs: *Beyond Oasis* (1), *Soleil* (2), and *Landstalker* (3) are all must-haves!

PERFECT TEN GAMES

Sega's most successful console is home to dozens of great titles but here are ten of the very best. Obviously, you may disagree with some of the entries – or perhaps with some of the omissions – so, if you do, let us know at the usual address. Then we can politely explain to you why we're right and you're wrong. Enjoy!



01



02

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** SONIC TEAM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

01 **After the success of the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, it came as no surprise to see the loveable scamp returning a year later in a new adventure.** With a refined engine, the addition of Miles "Tails" Prowler, a greatly enhanced bonus stage and an excellent two-player mode, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is easily one of the hedgehog's most memorable 16-bit outings. While the core gameplay is little different to that seen in the original, Sonic Team threw in plenty of new touches to ensure that gamers wouldn't feel short-changed. The end result is not only one of the Mega Drive's greatest platformers but quite possibly the hedgehog's finest hour on any system.

GUNSTAR HEROES

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** TREASURE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DYNAMITE HEADDY

02 **Outrageously good platformer/shooter that features dazzling graphics, a crazy relentless pace and dozens of fantastic boss encounters.** Created by a bunch of ex-Konami staffers (you should all know the story by now) *Gunstar Heroes* does tricks with the Mega Drive's hardware that many thought impossible and even today it has a freshness that belies its 13-year-old roots. While special mention must obviously go to the game's astounding visuals, Treasure also ensured that the gameplay was just as special and injected all manner of interesting play mechanics to ensure that every level remains as fresh as a proverbial daisy. If you're after a frenetic blaster then look no further. This is run-'n-gun heaven.

DEVIL CRASH

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNO SOFT
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THUNDER FORCE III

03 **There are a few pinball games on Sega's Mega Drive but this superb 1991 offering from Techno Soft remains a firm favourite.** While it only features one main table, it's well designed and boasts all manner of bonuses that lead you to several smaller, mini-tables. While Techno Soft's previous pinball title *Alien Crush* featured an alien theme, *Devil Crash* has chortling knights, chanting monks and dragons occupying its tables. Released in the UK as *Dragon's Fury*, *Devil Crash* is a superb pinball game that should last you forever. Oh, and it's got one of the most rocking soundtracks we've ever heard.

STREETS OF RAGE 2

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STREETS OF RAGE

04 **As with *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, Sega took everything that made the original *Streets Of Rage* so fun to play and turned it up to 11.** The visuals have had an overhaul with all the heroes and enemies being beefed up and boasting greatly improved detail. Yuzo Koshiro is back with another thumping soundtrack and the game's many bosses are tougher than ever. Each character now has a selection of special moves and there are four different protagonists to choose from: Axel and Blaze from the original game and new boys Skate and Max. A magnificent scrolling fighter that's crying out for a next-gen remake.

STRIDER

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** AFTER BURNER

05 **Oh come on, did you really think we'd do a Mega Drive top ten and not feature *Strider*?** Despite Darran's obsessive love for Capcom's purple-clad ninja (it's a long sad story) *Strider*'s addition is easily justified, as it's quite simply the strongest arcade port on Sega's 16-bit console. Not only does it capture all the character of the coin-op classic, it goes one step further and delivers a stunning soundtrack that actually manages to improve on the arcade original. Sure there's a fair amount of flickering here and there but as far as capturing the essence of the original game goes, no other Mega Drive conversion comes close. Essential.



03



04



05




06



07


08

DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF

» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JUNGLE STRIKE

06 **Set a year after the events in the Gulf War, *Desert Strike* sees you climbing into an Apache and using it to stop a despot in the Middle East from starting World War III.** Utilising an isometric viewpoint, EA's blaster saw you storming into armed bases to rescue POWs, while using your firepower to take out anything that stood in your way. Despite the destruction you can cause, *Desert Strike* is quite a cerebral affair, with many of the later levels requiring a fair amount of strategy to complete. The thinking man's shoot-'em-up.

SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

07 **Despite a lengthy development period, *Shinobi III*'s four-year wait was worth it.** Not only has the pace been increased, your ninja now knows a selection of new skills. Flying-kicks, a running dash and using your hands to swing across ceilings are just a few of the new abilities you can use and all have been perfectly integrated into the game. There are even sections where you can ride horses or surf along the crest of a wave, dispensing bad guys as you go. If only the later games showed a tenth of the imagination of *Shinobi III*…

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** NOVOTRADE INTERNATIONAL
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JAWS UNLEASHED

08 **Delightful underwater adventure that sees you trying to rescue your dolphin friends when they all get sucked up by a mysterious hurricane.** With its focus on exploring the expansive stages and its many devious puzzles, *Ecco The Dolphin* was quite unlike any other game at the time and instantly caught the public's attention. The underwater environments are full of detail and bursting with all sorts of exotic undersea creatures. Our only real complaints with *Ecco* is that some of the sections can be difficult to negotiate, ruining the otherwise tranquil atmosphere.



09

THUNDER FORCE IV

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** TECHNO SOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ALIEN CRUSH

09 **While *Thunder Force III* was never released in the UK, Sega atoned by releasing its superb sequel in 1993.** Techno Soft's fourth *Thunder Force* title (and the third to appear on the Mega Drive) boasted amazing visuals, over-the-top weaponry and a stunning soundtrack that perfectly complemented the frenetic on-screen action. As with *Thunder Force III*, the first four levels could be approached in any order but the stages themselves were far larger in scope and featured both vertical and horizontal sections. Throw in some insanely tough bosses, plenty of exotic locations and those stunning visuals and you have one of the Mega Drive's classiest shooters.

SHINING FORCE II

» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE

10 **While it essentially features the same combat system and gameplay mechanics as the original *Shining Force*, Sega's sequel is generally considered by many to be a far superior RPG.** Take the combat for example: it's a lot quicker now, making fights far less of a chore than before, and the new counter-attacks add a great degree of spice to the proceedings. The interaction of items is also better integrated with little touches, like automatically passing a picked-up item to another character when your main hero's pockets are full and being able to view an item's stats before you buy them means that everything flows along rather nicely. A superb RPG that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.


10





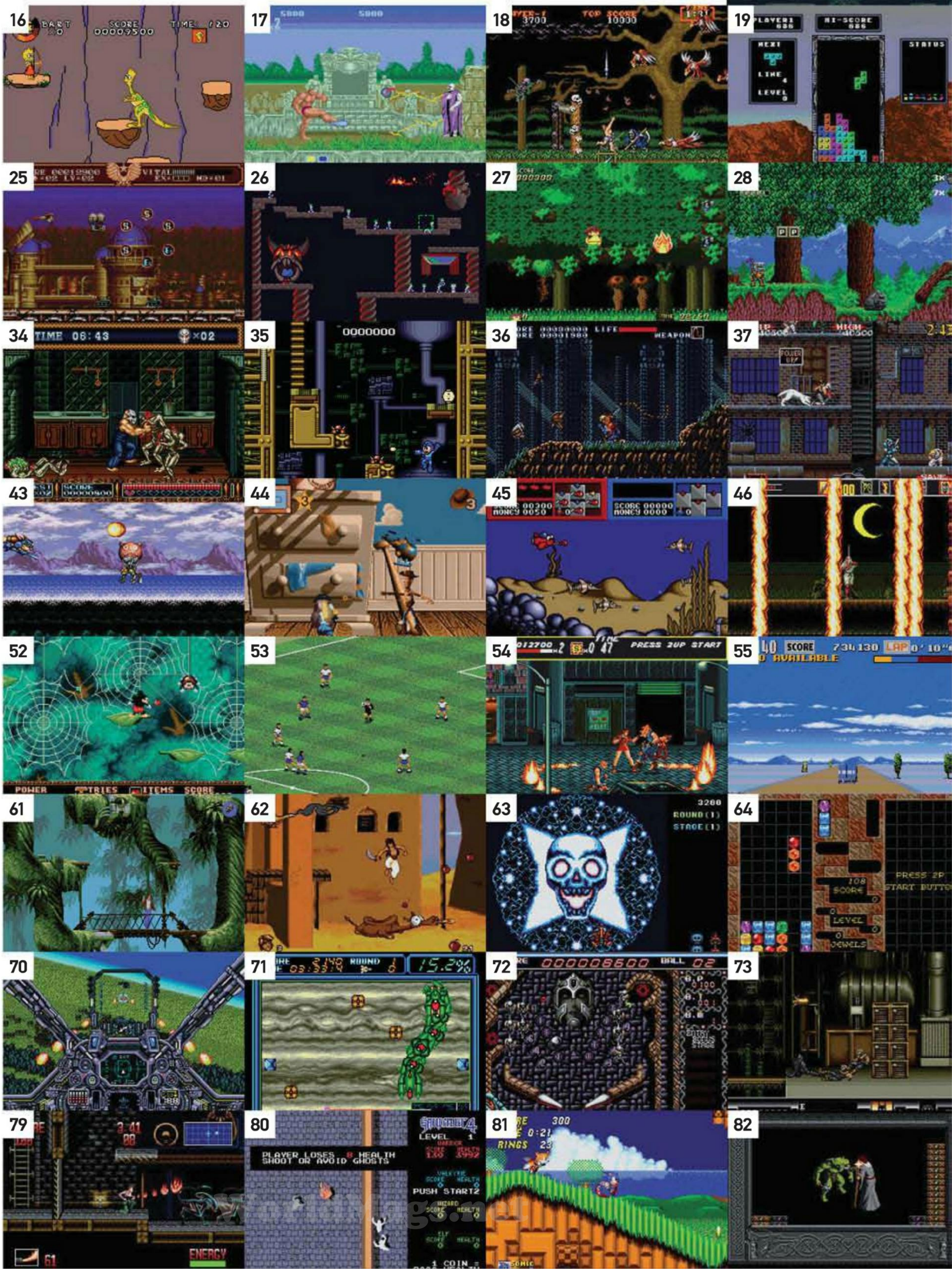
MEGA DRIVE

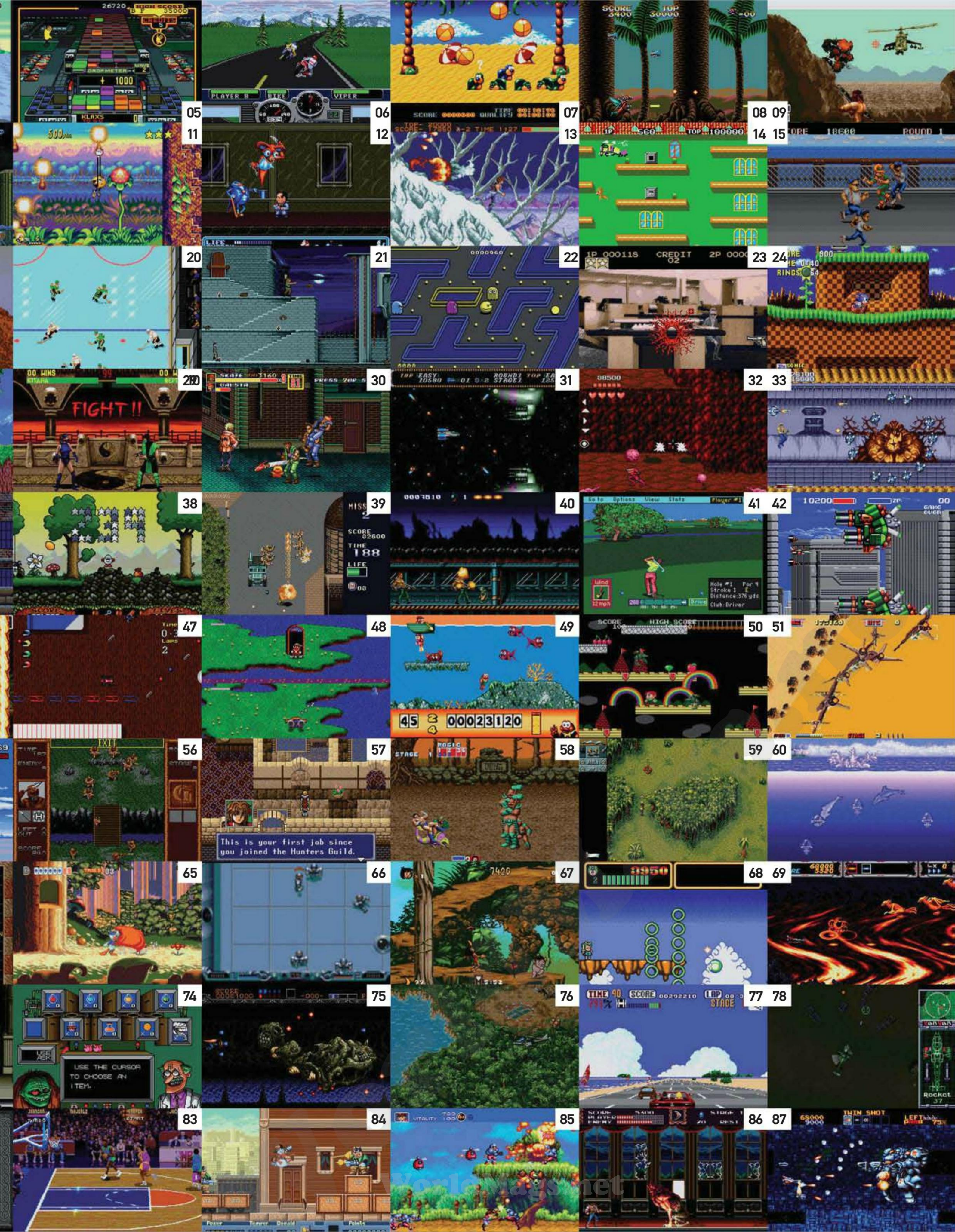
and the rest...

Sega's 16-bit Mega Drive is easily its greatest triumph and boasts a huge catalogue of fantastic games across a wide variety of genres…



01 MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER
02 BUBSY THE BOBCAT
03 FANTASIA
04 SPACE HARRIER II
05 KLAX
06 ROAD RASH
07 AQUATIC GAMES
08 NSECTOR X
09 RAMBO III
10 CHAKAN THE FOREVER MAN
11 RISTAR
12 GHOSTBUSTERS
13 STRIDER
14 FLICKY
15 DJ BOY
16 VIRTUAL BART
17 ALTERED BEAST
18 GHOULS 'N GHOSTS
19 TETRIS
20 NHL HOCKEY 92
21 DARK CASTLE
22 PAC-MANIA
23 LETHAL ENFORCERS
24 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
25 STEEL EMPIRE
26 LEMMINGS
27 WARDNER
28 KID CHAMELEON
29 MORTAL KOMBAT II
30 STREETS OF RAGE II
31 HELLFIRE
32 BATTLETOADS
33 FORGOTTEN WORLDS
34 SPLATTERHOUSE 3
35 MEGAMAN: THE WILEY WARS
36 EARNEST EVANS
37 SHADOW DANCER
38 FANTASTIC DIZZY
39 MERCS
40 THE TERMINATOR
41 PGA TOUR GOLF
42 AEROBLASTERS
43 ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES
44 TOY STORY
45 THE GADGET TWINS
46 REVENGE OF SHINOBI
47 MICRO MACHINES 96
48 TOE JAM & EARL
49 JAMES POND
50 RAINBOW ISLANDS
51 AFTER BURNER
52 CASTLE OF ILLUSION
53 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
54 STREETS OF RAGE
55 TURBO OUTRUN
56 GAIN GROUND
57 PHANTASY STAR IV
58 GOLDEN AXE
59 CANNON FODDER
60 ECCO THE DOLPHIN
61 FLASHBACK
62 ALADDIN
63 TRUXTON
64 COLUMNS
65 WORLD OF ILLUSION
66 SPEEDBALL 2
67 THE JUNGLE BOOK
68 WONDERBOY III
69 THUNDER FORCE III
70 AIR DIVER
71 ULTIMATE QIX
72 DEVIL CRASH
73 BATMAN
74 DECAP ATTACK
75 GYNOUG
76 URBAN STRIKE
77 OUTRUN
78 RED ZONE
79 ALIEN 3
80 GAUNTLET IV: THE FINAL ENCOUNTER
81 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
82 THE IMMORTAL
83 NBA JAM
84 QUACKSHOT
85 GUNSTAR HEROES
86 CASTLEVANIA: THE NEXT GENERATION
87 THUNDER FORCE IV



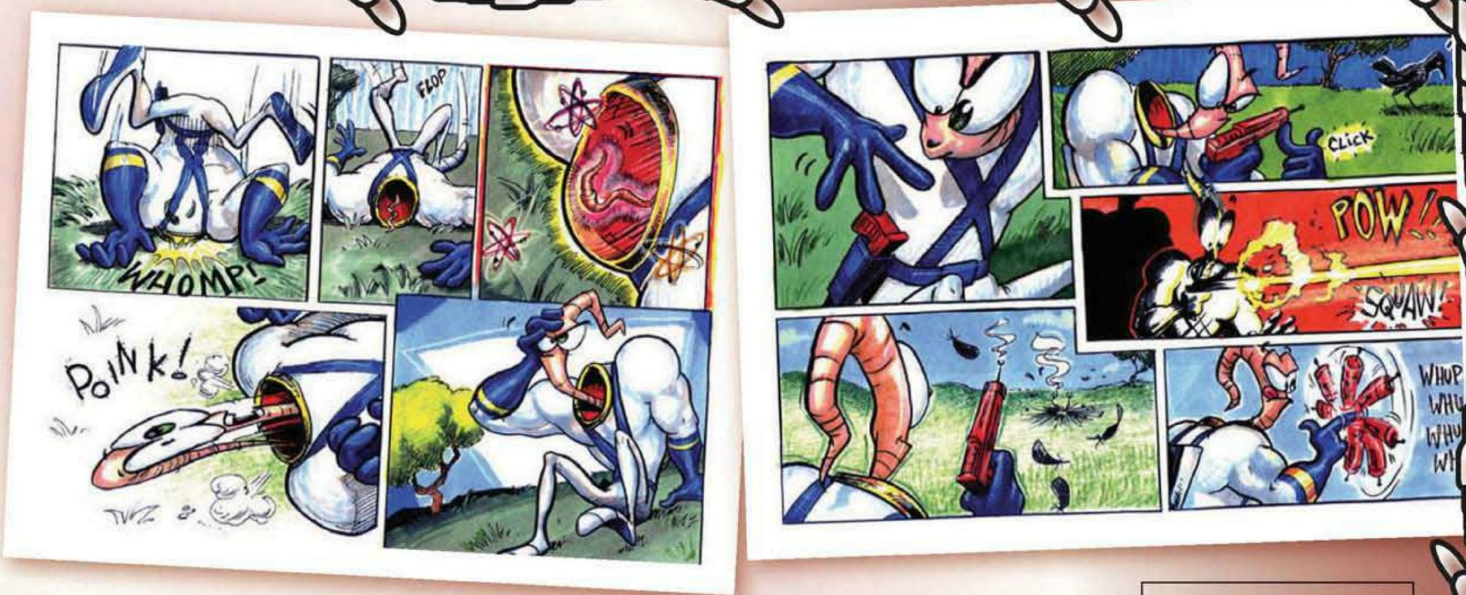

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USE THE CURSOR TO CHOOSE AN ITEM.
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THE MAKING OF...

EARTHWORM JIM

Like a candied apple of ecstasy dangling over a pit of rabid lawyers, Shiny Entertainment released its smash debut in 1994 featuring nothing more than a dirt-eating, chewy length of worm flesh. But it took men of far-reaching vision – with the cunning of a dozen well-organised hamsters – to make it happen. Dave Perry explained the depths of human endurance his team suffered to bring us Earthworm Jim: "Doug would force us to all listen to Johnny Cash." Who said there are no more heroes?





It was a tenuous time for videogames. Their popularity had reached a peak not seen since the mid-Seventies, but the looming storm cloud of three-dimensional change was... looming, like... a big, dark, polygonal cloud.**

Dave Perry found himself staring into the industry's abyss, wondering whether to jump, climb down, or be pushed: "I had an offer to head up the game development for a new game publisher called Playmates Interactive Entertainment." he begins. "I decided not to take the job and instead signed a contract to borrow a few million dollars from them to fund Shiny. Thank God I managed to pay them back!"

NOT NOW, PETER. I'M LAUGHING AT FATE!

But God had nothing to do with it. Unless you subscribe to the theory that God created worms. If that's the case, then Perry is right to thank Him and his legions of wriggly right-doers, for they provided the inspiration around which Shiny's establishing title was built. Otherwise, he'd do well to thank another creature (who may or may not have been created by God (who may or may not exist)): Doug TenNapel. "In those days, we always had lots of ideas, and licences too, so we had many choices of direction. The team mentioned a guy called Doug TenNapel for the animator's position and I said he couldn't join the team unless he did a demo to show his talent," explains the 6' 8" code commander.

> "I HATED THE STUFF THAT INTERPLAY, VIS AND CRAVE DID. I ASKED THEM TO STOP, BUT INTERPLAY REFUSED" DAVE PERRY

TenNapel had freelanced on early Nintendo games and had been employed as lead animator on Bluesky Software's Mega Drive adaptation of *Jurassic Park*, when he was introduced to Perry. As TenNapel himself admits, his strength was not in animation, but in character design.

Perry told us about his first impressions of the renowned artist: "Doug is very tall. Like me." However, Perry's opinions go beyond the pencil jockey's physical stature, how ever impressive and similar to his own it might be.

"He's a super creative guy, is easy to like and he's even good at basketball. Doug just oozes new characters. If you had lunch with him, his napkin would have five new characters doodled on it by the time you left the restaurant. I can't imagine how many he has now in his sketch books." Our guess would be 84, but it's one in particular that has our immediate interest: an eccentric hybrid of sci-fi technology, a cylindrical invertebrate and an over-full wheelie bin of surrealist humour.

"Doug drew Earthworm Jim as his demo for Shiny, and got the job! I liked it so much it became our chosen direction and we turned down everything else to make it happen," recalls Perry. TenNapel had been desperate to leave his current employment and get in on the ground level with a truly inspired game design, so had gone overboard preparing for his Shiny interview.

Although it wasn't his intention at the time, all the characters he'd squeezed from his pencil in preparation for the showdown with Perry were incorporated into this new project – each more surreal than the last. However, in order for Shiny's debut title to really grab gamers by the eyeballs and twist their nipples into submission if they tried to put the controller down, Dave Perry insisted every team member take an active role in the game's early development.



» Whether it's real life or a videogame, seeing someone getting bit on the arse is always funny

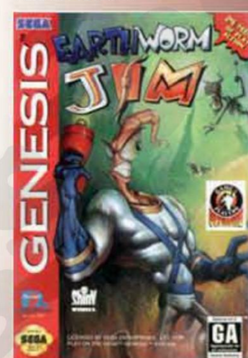


» Jim wonders if anyone knows that he's stuck to his gun…

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** SHINY ENTERTAINMENT
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** DAVE PERRY, DOUG TENNAPEL
- » **YEAR RELEASED:** 1994
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ENTER THE MATRIX
SYSTEMS: GAMECUBE, PLAYSTATION 2, PC, XBOX
YEAR: 2003

MDK
SYSTEMS: MAC, PC, PLAYSTATION, DREAMCAST
YEAR: 1997

MESSIAH
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 2000



THE MAKING OF...

EARTHWORM JIM

ANIMATED ANNELIDS

Jim's transformation to the small screen, though fairly short lived, saw almost as much cult success as the game. While Doug TenNapel had provided the voice of Jim in the original videogame, his cartoon counterpart was eloquently articulated by Homer Simpson himself, Dan Castellaneta (after previously voicing Jim's appearances in *Clayfighter 63 1/3* and *Earthworm Jim 3-D*). Perry explained his part in the expansion of Jim's universe: "It was written by Doug Langdale and Doug TenNapel worked closely with him. I think they still work together today! So they made good partners. "While we were making *EWJ* we had laserdiscs of Tex Avery cartoons playing 24/7, so the animators were always inspired. I was more on the business side of all these deals so I didn't get involved in the details of the toy design or cartoon story. "I did work hard on getting a movie deal and actually got there, only to be stopped by Universal. But that's another story!"

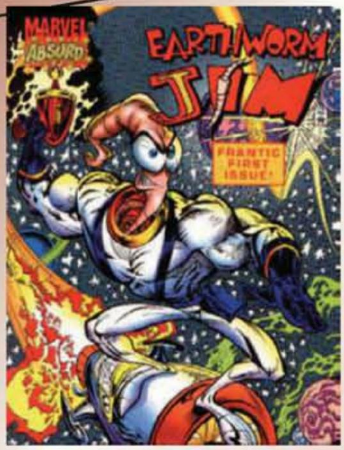












» Marvel published a three issue *Jim* comic, although a second comic was released only in Britain, based on the animated series rather than the game

"DOUG IS VERY TALL, LIKE ME"
DAVE PERRY



» Go to heck! Jim returns to Evil the Cat's lair in the sequel



» Jim was bungee jumping long before it was popular

"Doug had created another character in the past called Evil the Cat, so I wanted him to include that character in the game and we came up with a rule that everyone had to help with designs. So, everyone would draw sketches of ideas and we would make a giant pile of them. Everyone would laugh at the programmer's artwork, as it sucked, but it would always get conversation going. Sometimes people would believe in something strongly, so they'd pull together a demo to show what they meant. If it was possible, it went in," he recalls.

Surely the creative process of something as timeless as *Earthworm Jim* went far beyond the artistic content, though.? After all, the strength of the backstory as well as the quality of the script must go a long way toward generating the depth of gameplay that such classics exhibit. We put the question to Perry: "No. The game didn't really have a story or a script."

Fair enough. It was just a theory.

COW LAUNCHED

Building a virtual Tate Gallery of surrealist cartoon artwork for a run-'n'-gun platform game is a great idea but hinges on finding a programmer detached enough from reality to try to chart the elastic limits of a Mega Drive cartridge. Fortunately, Perry knew the perfect candidate, who was well known for washing his face in the experimental programming sink.

"*Earthworm Jim* was the last game I personally programmed. I miss it terribly. My office has hundreds of programming books just waiting for the day I retire from directing projects and get back to making them myself," continues Perry. And platformers certainly seemed to be his bag, as he continued: "I'd programmed a lot of platform games over the years; I had just recently done *Global Gladiators*, *Cool Spot* and *Aladdin* in a row. So I'd been trying to find ways to get the 'feel' of the games nice and tight."

Indeed, a cynic could easily write *EWJ* off as just another platform game but it was this kind of invaluable experience that enabled the animators to lift the worm off the screen and allow players to connect with the character.

"Back then the animation was hand drawn (with pencils!), scanned and coloured digitally. It would then pass into a compression tool, which was my secret weapon. There's a lot more animation in *Earthworm Jim* than a Mega Drive can store!" laughs Perry, looking back at the endless difficulties of programming with a distinct fondness. He continues:

"We were lucky as we had Mike Dietz as our Animation Director. He worked closely with Disney on *Aladdin* and was probably the best paper animator in the business. That said, it's not just about animating, it's about timing and finding ways to compress animations. He would do time sheets that would use frame 1, 2, 3 then 2, then 7, then 3, then 1, etc. He'd re-use old frames and draw the animation intending that to happen. So he was thinking technically too and that made him priceless."

Standing back and looking at the entire *EWJ* project, the wealth of technical expertise infused in the game (which ran parallel with the apparently endless spaghetti string of surrealist humour) was something particularly special. Each member brought a proficiency to the table that other developers could only dream about. Perry agrees.

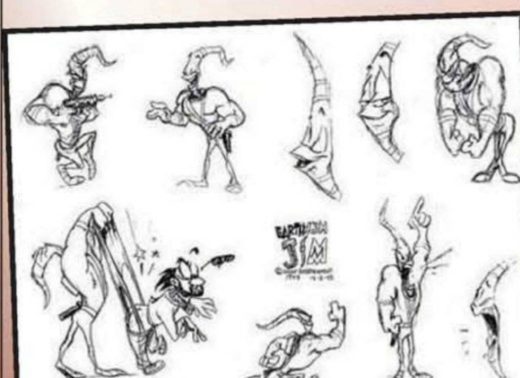
"For my previous four games, the audio was done by Tommy Tallarico. So for *Earthworm Jim* I told him to really go for it. In *Global Gladiators*, he found a way to get real guitar samples to sound like they're being played, so for *EWJ* he decided to go farther and did banjo tunes, bagpipe tunes, harmonica, and more. What you hear is an audio guy experiencing freedom and having fun."

Successfully bottling "fun", as the Shiny team had managed with their opening number, granted them the industry acclaim they deserved, but was also the ultimate cause of the company's woe. Crows were circling over Jim's head and they weren't waiting for a cow to fall from the sky.

"I worked on *Earthworm Jim 2* with our other Shiny programmer Andy Astor, who did the Special Edition for Sega CD. I liked those games. I hated the stuff that Interplay, VIS and Crave did. I asked them to stop but Interplay refused."

MAXIMUM SUCKAGE

Sequels are inevitable but once a hungry conglomerate sets their mind to wringing every last drop of blood from the stone of a once great game,



» The original design sheet for Jim's patented "Wedgie Attack"



» Programmer of *Jim* and Shiny founder (as in he founded Shiny – he's not literally polished): Dave Perry. Visit www.dperry.com to meet him in person



» A little known "fact" is Doug TenNapel doesn't draw using pencils, but frozen worms. He sharpens them and draws really quickly before they thaw out and escape





"DOUG AND I KEPT SAYING EVERY TIME WE MET, "LET'S REFORM THE OLD TEAM AND DO IT RIGHT" DAVE PERRY

the franchise invariably suffers. The creative team behind *EWJ* were hung out to dry and could only watch as their beloved invertebrate was homogenised, dissected and sold off piece by piece.

"I got nervous as I knew 3D was coming and my team just wasn't equipped to handle it. I tried to stick it out and started buying Silicon Graphics computers, etc, but this money was out of my bank account. The team wasn't excited about 3D so I sold my equity in Shiny to Interplay and Interplay became responsible to pay all royalties on future sales. That's when the trouble hit. They kept making *Earthworm Jim* games, conversions and so on – none of us got paid. Still to this day.

"They still own all the *Earthworm Jim* rights. I guess that's what life is all about, you make mistakes and you learn from them," Perry muses.

While Jim's excursion into the third dimension may have been brain-freezingly uninspired, today's summery retro climate has ensured it would only be a matter of time before he crawled majestically from the earth once again. Perry told us what he knows of the PSP's recent excavation of *EWJ* soil: a project with the potential to reunite the old crew, but fell at the inter-political-corporate-mind-interference hurdle.

"Doug and I kept saying every time we met, 'Let's reform the old team and do it right'. The conversation happened again at the first Video Games Live concert at the Hollywood Bowl, so I started to make it happen. Together we convinced all the original core team members to consider reforming "the band" for an entirely new *Earthworm Jim* game.

"Atari secured the rights from Interplay and it was all go. Then in February 2006, I resigned from Shiny when Atari put all their studios up for sale. I moved onto other things, as did all the *EWJ* guys, so we really don't have anything to do with the new game. In October 2006, Shiny was bought by Foundation 9 without the *EWJ* licence, so I guess Atari has another team they plan to do it with. We all look forward to playing it, though," continues Perry. Previews have been optimistic, but it looks as though Atari's bird wasn't early enough to catch the worms that could have made all the difference.

Despite the pitfalls *Jim* fell into once the profit machine started rolling, Perry remains a firm fan of the awesome annelid's outlandish antics, and foresees a day when the worm will turn once again.

"I still play it to try to understand why it was a cult hit. Was it timing; was it the graphics… the humour? I'm not sure we'll ever know. I think it was probably all about the chemistry of the people that made it.

"Someday, somehow, we will do this right and do this justice. When Interplay goes bankrupt, I'll try to buy the rights personally.

"The core team stays in touch. We were soooo close to making a new game together. Maybe when I start programming again? That would be groovy!"



» Jim was a versatile fellow, erm… worm

THE GAMES MASTER

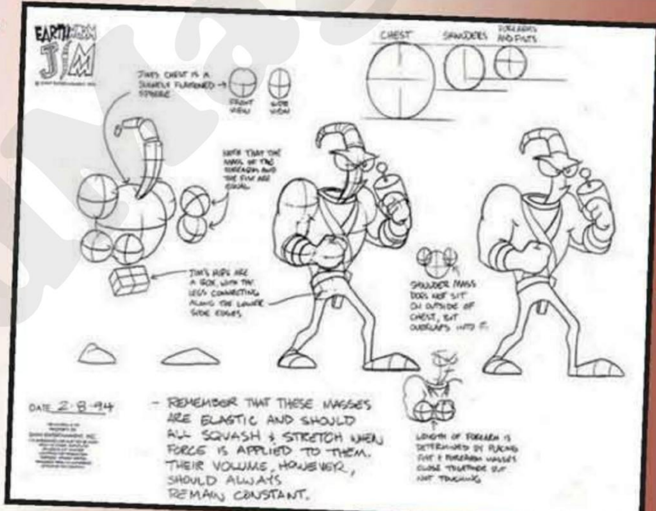
Before he had his own TV show, Jim made a special appearance on the UK's first dedicated videogame programme, *GamesMaster* (hosted by the other Dave Perry). A special level was donated by Shiny for the contestants to play, but controversy struck when the code for the demo was later leaked onto the internet. The prize (also donated by Perry) was quite fitting, considering the predicament Shiny was put in, as Perry explains:

"We made a foot-tall, hand-painted Earthworm Jim sculpture for a prize for a UK television show. Dominik Diamond was to give it away. So we mailed it off, then we got a copy of the show that aired to watch. We all nearly fell off our chairs when we saw the mangled Earthworm Jim "prize". It had been crushed in the mail and the TV people must have assumed we'd designed it with Jim's head up his own ass. It was so funny, the look on the person's face that got the award. Thanks Fedex!"





» The animation throughout *Earthworm Jim* was superb and gave the game masses of character



» Even Jim's invertebrate head had detailed specifications when it came to movement

Conversion Capers

Gauntlet

DOMINATING ARCADE FLOORS EVERYWHERE, THE MEGALITHIC GAUNTLET COIN-OP COULD HAVE BEEN CUT FROM A MOUNTAIN SIDE: A DOORWAY INTO THE IMMEASURABLE DEPTHS OF ED LOGG'S VISION. REFASHIONING THIS DIGITAL DOLMEN INTO A HANDY-SIZED HOME CONVERSION WAS A TASK AS MAMMOTH AS SURVIVING THE CATACOMBS OF THE GAME ITSELF. RETRO GAMER SPOKE TO THOSE AUDACIOUS CHAMPIONS WHO RAN THE GAUNTLET IN 1986 AND BROUGHT BACK THE SECRETS OF ATARI'S DARKEST DUNGEON FOR ALL TO SEE

"We were absolutely determined that our conversion of *Gauntlet* would be the best and, once the game was actually released, the competition didn't stand a chance."

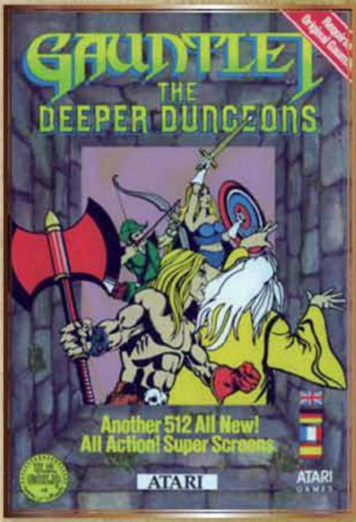
Tony Porter's claim might be a bold one but, as programmer of the Spectrum, Amstrad, MSX and Master System home versions of the arcade cult classic, the evidence of his triumph shouts a strident accord from deep within computer game history. At the time, U.S. Gold had an encompassing agreement with Atari for home conversions, a valuable contract that was sure to pay off with a success story like *Gauntlet*. Kevin Bulmer, graphic artist for the many conversions, told us how he and Porter were brought on board the coveted project.

"Geoff Brown of U.S. Gold wanted us to drop a game we were working on (called *Pentacle*) and do the home conversions of his top licence, *Gauntlet*. This raised several issues, not least of these being whether the game was even possible on home machines. Since the licence was so valuable to U.S. Gold, a condition of us doing the work was to become employees of Gremlin Graphics and to work at new offices set up in Birmingham especially for this project. After much consideration and trips to visit Ian Stewart at Gremlin's offices in Sheffield,





» The old team was put back together when it came time to convert the sequel



» *The Deeper Dungeons* was a 512 level add-on of the best maps sent in by players of the original game

we all agreed and signed up." It was apparent from the outset that shoehorning a powerful game system like the *Gauntlet* coin-op into an 8-bit package would be like trying to put smoke into a milk bottle using a cricket bat. Whoever tackled this daunting assignment was going to have to dissect the game on more than just a technical level; the intricacies of what made *Gauntlet* so unequivocally playable would have to be routed from the extraordinary, yet superficial, elements that cast an impressive sheen across the gigantic, imposing cabinet. Surprisingly, Porter found a familiar friend when examining the machine, though in something of a subdued role.

"To put this into perspective, you have to realise the sheer power of the arcade machine at the side of the computers we were writing for," he continues. "Perhaps the one thing I will never forget is that the arcade machine actually had a Z80 processor in it – the same processor that drives the home computers I had to rewrite *Gauntlet* for. Amazingly, its sole purpose in the arcade machine was just to read the four joysticks and buttons!"

Coaxing what was essentially a joystick driver (handling not much more than a baker's dozen of digital inputs) into running an entire RPG was going to require some difficult decisions. Deriving generalised estimations of what makes a good game great is the foundation of a successful home conversion, and it's down to the beleaguered developer to keep the heart of a much-loved game beating inside a very different chest.

TALK IS CHEAP, FOUR IS A CROWD

The original arcade machine couldn't 'alf natter and, although we look back now with knowing ears (belatedly saluting the Atari engineers who spoke to us vicariously through their magnificent machine) this was not a feature that had any particular influence on the dynamics of *Gauntlet*'s celebrated gameplay. In fact, many an avid dungeon dweller would admit to answering the crypt keeper with phrases influenced more by irate passion than technological awe.

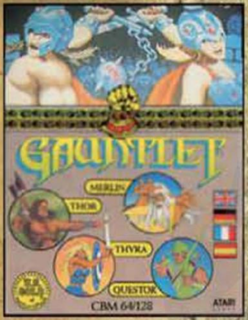
"None of the Z80 or C64 versions retained speech. I'm afraid to say that while it wasn't beyond those machines in principal, in practice it sounded awful and took up a huge amount of room - it just wasn't practical. Later, the Master System and Atari ST versions were able to keep the sounds but these were much more capable machines," remembers Porter.

The multiplayer aspect of *Gauntlet* was another significant part of its allure but the incremented thrill of four players over two was not sufficient to shunt the game into the realms of stardom it promptly achieved. These characteristics were useful for initially drawing players to the coin-op from across a busy arcade, yet both were cursory enough in nature to have little impact on its longevity. Neither could these facets be brought home, so the 8-bit *Gauntlet*

IN THE KNOW

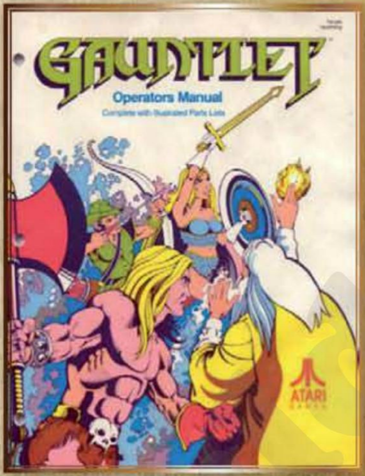


- » **PUBLISHER:** U.S. GOLD
- » **DEVELOPER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** RPG/MAZE





» Tiger's handheld LCD *Gauntlet* didn't hold much to the style of the original, but the name was enough to sell it



» The artwork from the original coin-op manual was revived time and again as different conversions were put on the shelves



"WE WORKED OUT THE INTRICACIES OF THE GAME SIMPLY BY PLAYING IT" TONY PORTER

CONVERSION CAPERS





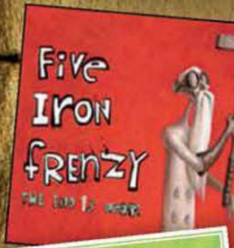
Gauntlet itself is a clone of a 1983 Atari 800 game called *Dandy Dungeon*, (above) written by John Palevich, who then converted it into *Dark Chambers* for the 7800 in 1988 (right)

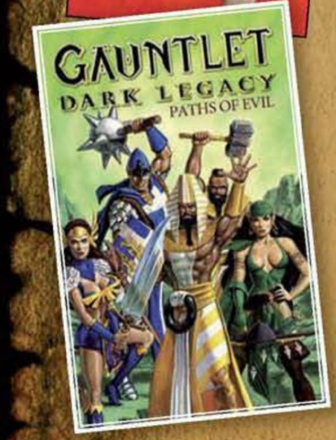


NOVEL IDEAS

The lifelong popularity of the *Gauntlet* franchise has prompted it to break out of the videogame medium and into other forms of entertainment. In 2004, Richard C White converted the *Gauntlet* franchise into a planned series of novels, the first being *Gauntlet Dark Legacy – Book 1: Paths Of Evil*, featuring the Wizard, Valkyrie, Elf, Warrior and Knight on a mission to find the shards of the Gryphon Window and save the world from something evil (probably).

Although *Gauntlet* has caused many of us to break into rapturous song over the years, Denver born Christian ska band, Five Iron Frenzy, actually released a number entitled *Wizard Needs Food, Badly* on their 2003 penultimate album, *The End Is Near*. It was then re-released on their concluding album in 2004, with the wonderfully esoteric title, *The End Is Here*





"SHOEHORNING THE GAUNTLET COIN-OP INTO AN 8-BIT PACKAGE WOULD BE LIKE TRYING TO PUT SMOKE INTO A MILK BOTTLE USING A CRICKET BAT"

couldn't rely on the attractive veneer used by the coin-op to make sales.

"One of the hardest things we faced during the conversions was the lack of support from Atari at a coding level – we didn't get to see any source code for the arcade version until well after we had completed the conversions. We worked out the intricacies of the game simply by playing it – we had an arcade machine on free play in the office."

The key to finding the soul of one of the most successful arcade conversions is summed up in one quick, if slightly austere, sound bite from Tony Porter: they worked it out 'simply by playing it'. Had Atari supplied the black-and-white building blocks of the machine's composition, rather than the team spending such valuable time intimately learning about the game's qualities, then their understanding of what made *Gauntlet* remarkable might have been severely diminished.

However, as with all works of art, vision and passion can only be realised through technical application, and even though the Gremlin team may have connected with the spirit of *Gauntlet* personally, that understanding would be for nothing if it couldn't be shared with the game-playing public. Bulmer explained how he was able to accurately recreate the stylised countenance of the arcade screen.

"I was helped immensely by a utility Bill Allen wrote for the Atari ST that allowed me to work in the Degas paint package (remember that?) and then convert the graphics down to the colour and pixel resolution of the individual machines. The utility was named Keating after Tom Keating, the famous painting forger who was in the news at the time. I had control over everything and could make sure that each version was the best it could be."



» Tony Porter: "I sum up *Gauntlet* with the phrase 'If it moves, shoot it, it if doesn't then shoot it until it does'"

ON THE LEVEL

Gauntlet was not only huge in terms of its arcade grandfather's colossal footprint, but was also infused with a scope of gameplay that went right up to the boundaries of comprehension then leaned out over the edge. Not only were there incalculable numbers of enemy characters on each sprawling stage, but the dungeons themselves delved over 500 cavernous levels into the virtual earth of Atari's masterpiece. How was Porter able to recreate this distinctive, non-linear journey through the vast catacombs?

"We had to contend with the sheer size of the arcade game in terms of levels, and the fact that the game would randomly choose which level you would play (once above level seven). For the tape-based versions of the game, where random loading of levels was impossible, we had to come up with a system to get as close to selecting random levels as possible. In the end we loaded up a larger block of levels and then chose which ones to play, so the order, whilst not truly random, was almost always different each time you played."

Guilty of that most heinous of 8-bit sins – the multi-load – cassette-based conversions of *Gauntlet* must receive recognition for employing one of the least intrusive segmented loading methods ever seen. With such a concentrated onslaught of rabid gameplay, the half-minute breaks were sometimes a welcome opportunity to stretch cramped fingers and twisted knuckles, and were short enough to sustain the game's momentum. A fair trade for ensuring the magnitude of the original game was not lost due to technological restrictions. Bulmer explained the dexterous techniques used to keep *Gauntlet* true to its mighty lineage.

"Tony spearheaded a drive to keep loading times to an absolute minimum once the game had started. We needed to hold in memory the entire map and details of any changes to it (opened doors, crumbling walls, etc) and all of the graphics. The key to it was a unique system Tony invented to store the maps in a compressed form. It was very elegant and simple but allowed us to keep all of the detail from all of the maps in a fraction of the memory the arcade machine used."

QUANTITY AND QUALITY

The protagonist's individual characteristics worked brilliantly to immerse gamers in the world of *Gauntlet*, but the nature of the enemy was where it broke all conventions. More akin to the zombie hordes of *Day Of The Dead* than the *Dungeons & Dragons* RPGs that inspired the game, the swarms of enemies clawed and clamoured at walls and doors in a desperate attempt to attack the player, rushing



The original arcade hit in all its glory. It heralded a new beginning for co-operative play and spawned countless sequels



The latest incarnation, *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*, has met with harsh reviews, but certainly looks the part



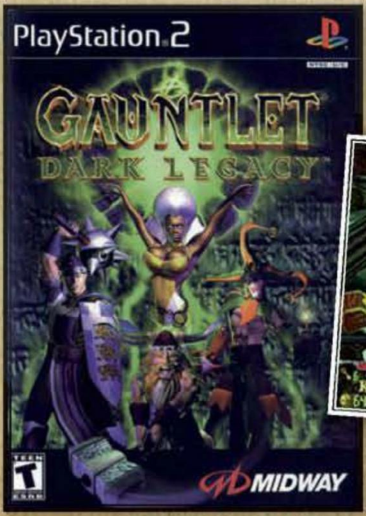
blindly onto their weapons without care when the opportunity inevitably arose to attack. This essential 'horror survival' behaviour, coupled with the sheer quantity of aggressors, was yet another potential stumbling block for *Gauntlet*'s conversion team, but far too important a facet to neglect.

"The levels were not actually too much of a problem, apart from the sheer time needed to design them on our editors and the problems with loading from tape. The volume of sprites certainly was an issue, but we eventually resolved it by making the monsters up out of characters (they are actually drawn the same way as the level walls) – thus they are not truly 'sprites' but they did move around, turn and act the same as their sprite counterparts from the arcade and, by taking this approach, we could keep the essential game speed up," continues Porter. Bulmer also had to relearn what he knew about memory management in order to realise the monstrous armies populating every level of *Gauntlet*'s cavernous mausoleum.

"*Gauntlet* required lots of animation. We allowed each enemy to run in all eight directions but limited their animation frames to four directions. The heroes had lots more animation. There were also all of the sound effects to cram in. I don't think there was anything else we could have done or fitted into the memory of those machines."

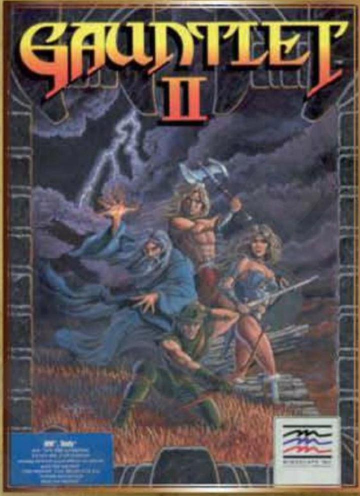
The principal features that made *Gauntlet* such a remarkable game were few and simple, yet digging them out from beneath a mountain of hard gloss and dazzling glamour and distilling their vital essences into an intoxicating 8-bit brew takes a certain kind of skill. Tony Porter and the rest of the dedicated crew at Gremlin Graphics, who made it their passion to free the game from the arcade dungeons and deliver it to the home warriors, indisputably contributed much to the legendary reputation *Gauntlet* enjoys today.

"I am still proud of all the versions of *Gauntlet* that we did," continues Porter, "but perhaps the best thing was after we finally got our hands on the source code of the original and we realised just how many of the 'hidden' aspects of the game (such as how to control which teleport you go to and which exit you come out of, and how 'Death' worked) we got right without ever seeing the code. Bob (Armour), Bill (Allen), Kevin and myself sat down and looked through it and it was amazing to see the same logic sequences we had worked out the hard way, written down in Atari's source code!"





» Fans of the franchise should definitely check out *Dark Legacy* on the PS2 and Xbox – the bloodline of the original remains healthy in this game



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Gauntlet: The Deeper Dungeons
Gauntlet II
Gauntlet: The Third Encounter
Gauntlet III: The Final Quest
Gauntlet IV
Gauntlet Legends
Gauntlet: Dark Legacy
Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows

THE DUNGEON MASTER
After the success of Gremlin Graphics/U.S. Gold's home versions, Porter was brought back to the dungeons when it was time to make a *Gauntlet* conversion for Sega's Master System.

"Later on I revisited the *Gauntlet* arena whilst heading up U.S. Gold's Sega department and wrote the Master System version of the game. To aid me in this I spent a week out in Japan at Sega's HQ to learn about the intricacies of the Master System console. This became my best version of *Gauntlet* – especially as the technical bods at Sega had told me that doing the static side panel with a full 8-way smooth scrolling game was impossible. Boy did I love the look on their faces when I demonstrated it working!"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS



THE EIDOLON
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 8-BIT, C64, MSX, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

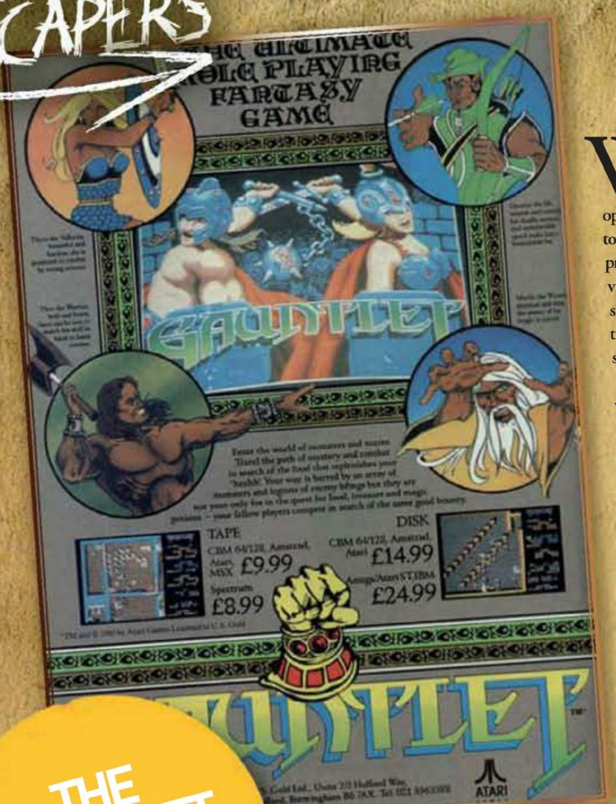


GAUNTLET II
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, C64, DOS, NES, GAME BOY, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988



SKATE CRAZY
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, C64, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988

"THE DUNGEONS THEMSELVES DELVED OVER 500 CAVERNOUS LEVELS INTO THE VIRTUAL EARTH OF ATARI'S MASTERPIECE"



THE GAUNTLET CONVERSIONS

When Ed Logg's *Gauntlet* was released onto an unsuspecting public in 1985, it brought co-operative play to a whole new level. The ability to play with or against three other players was previously unheard of and gave *Gauntlet* a vitality that was missing from many other similar games and, 22 years later - thanks to titles like *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* - gamers are still enjoying it.

One of *Gauntlet*'s most interesting aspects was that competition would often surface long before a game had actually begun. Find an unmanned machine, for example, and the first obstacle you'd often face was trying to get past your mates as you all tried to play the Valkyrie (interestingly, the Elf is considered the best balanced character). Of course, once the game started things didn't necessarily get any easier. While keeping yourself and your friends alive was a pressing priority, everything would fall apart with the introduction of *Gauntlet*'s treasure chests, potions and food. A sensible party would gauge the health/wealth of the overall group and assess the situation accordingly, but where was the fun in that? Consequently, *Gauntlet* would often result in a mad scramble for the dungeon's valuable assets that very often spilt out into the real world.

What made *Gauntlet* such a joy to play, though, was that when the tantrums had stopped and all the toys were finally back in the pram, the game became even more rewarding. Lone Wolfs desperate for glory would soon realise that only an unlimited amount of credits would get them to the deeper levels, so unless you were a millionaire, your best bet was to actually team up with your friends and leave the bickering for another day.

Gauntlet was a benchmark in co-operative gameplay and even today it still manages to delight and frustrate in equal measures. Little wonder then that it was recently made available on the 360's Xbox Live Arcade Service for a whole new generation.

HOME CONVERSIONS

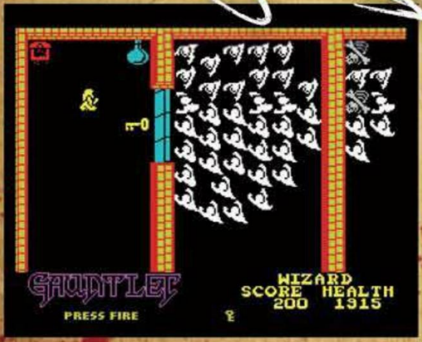
The original arcade version of *Gauntlet* appeared on a variety of machines that ranged from the humble Tandy to Atari's 16-bit ST. While *Gauntlet* has appeared on countless compilations ranging from the PlayStation to Microsoft's 360, we're more concerned with covering the original 8 and 16-bit variations.



ATARI-XL



The Atari 8-bit impresses with its deft use of colour. Not so much a glorious work of Technicolor, pixelised impressionism, so much as a comprehensible use of easy viewing tones that avoid kicking you in the back of the retina. Sadly, with such a busy screen, it's easy to lose track of which rampaging horde is massacring you at which particular moment, yet this version manages to keep a clear colour scheme for each level that doesn't interfere with the action too much. That said, the action is considerably less packed than *Gauntlet* requires, making it more of a maze game than an actual fighter. What a shame that the clunky controls make it such a bitch to play…



SINCLAIR SPECTRUM



We'll forgive the tinny speech, lack of in-game music (something all the 8-bit computer versions suffered from) and dull colour scheme, as this is a pretty solid conversion that should make all Spectrum owners proud. Granted, it's no R-Type, but a surprising amount of detail has been crammed into Sir Clive's humble machine. There's always a huge amount of enemies on screen and the all-important gameplay runs along at a fair old pace. It can sometimes be a little difficult to spot yourself when the screen gets too crowded but, to be fair, this is also a problem with many of the other conversions. A good solid effort that's worth a play.



COMMODORE 64



Yes it scrolls smoothly, and yes, it sounds very nice but, for some reason, we were never that impressed with the Commodore 64 outing. Maybe it was the controls, as for some reason they never seemed quite as responsive as some of the other 8-bit versions that were available (although to be fair they were a damn site better than the god-awful XL's).

Visually, everything was a little on the chunky side, which gave the game a somewhat squashed appearance and, as a result, *Gauntlet* on the C64 comes across as an ugly girlfriend. You're more than happy to jump her in privacy, but wouldn't want to show her off in front of your mates.



AMSTRAD CPC



Porter and Bulmer claim that the CPC version of *Gauntlet* is the best out of all the 8-bit variations and, let's face it, who are we to argue?

Gauntlet on the Amstrad may not be able to reach the same glorious heights that the Master System and Atari ST ports achieved, but what's on offer is of a very high standard, especially when you consider the limitations of the machine.

The most notable difference is how damn nice everything looks. Rather than suffering from the usual Speccy port, lucky CPC owners were treated to the sort of vibrancy that wouldn't look out of place in Kew Gardens.



MASTER SYSTEM



Now this is very impressive. Granted, the game was made a good few years after the other versions, but this is a fantastic conversion that did the Master System proud. There's plenty of speech, the game plays true to the arcade original and everything looks simply wonderful. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the Master System game, though, is how fast the thing moves. Regardless of which character you use, the whole game nips along at an incredibly frantic pace and still manages to impress. It may have only been a two-player game but *Gauntlet* remains one of the Master System's greatest conversions.



ATARI ST



Despite being advertised in various magazines, we've never seen an Amiga version of *Gauntlet*, so Atari's ST manages to steal all the 16-bit glory by default. Comparing the superior ST version to its 8-bit peers is like shooting fish in a barrel though, so we'll just point out that *Gauntlet* on the ST is probably the most faithful port of *Gauntlet* we've ever played on a home machine. Sure, later systems such as the PlayStation and Xbox feature near perfect ports of the arcade original game, but they're not exactly pushing the host hardware and thus don't count. For its time, if you wanted to emulate the experience of playing *Gauntlet* outside of an actual arcade this was the version to go for. It even had four-player support. Utterly essential.

OTHER VERSIONS TO CONSIDER

APPLE II, MSX II, PC MS-DOS, TANDY COLOUR COMPUTER, PLAYSTATION (1998) ARCADE'S GREATEST HITS VOLUME 2, DREAMCAST (2000) MIDWAY'S GREATEST ARCADE HITS VOLUME 2, XBOX (2003) MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES, GAMECUBE (2003) MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES, PLAYSTATION 2 (2003) MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES, PSP (2006) MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES EXTENDED PLAY, XBOX 360 (2005) GAUNTLET HD, GAME BOY ADVANCE (2005) GAUNTLET/RAMPART, PC WINDOWS (1998) ARCADE'S GREATEST HITS – THE ATARI COLLECTION 2, PC WINDOWS (2004) MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES

ELITE

MOSTLY HARMLESS



- **PUBLISHER**: ACORNSOFT
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** SPACE ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ACORN ELECTRON
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



HISTORY

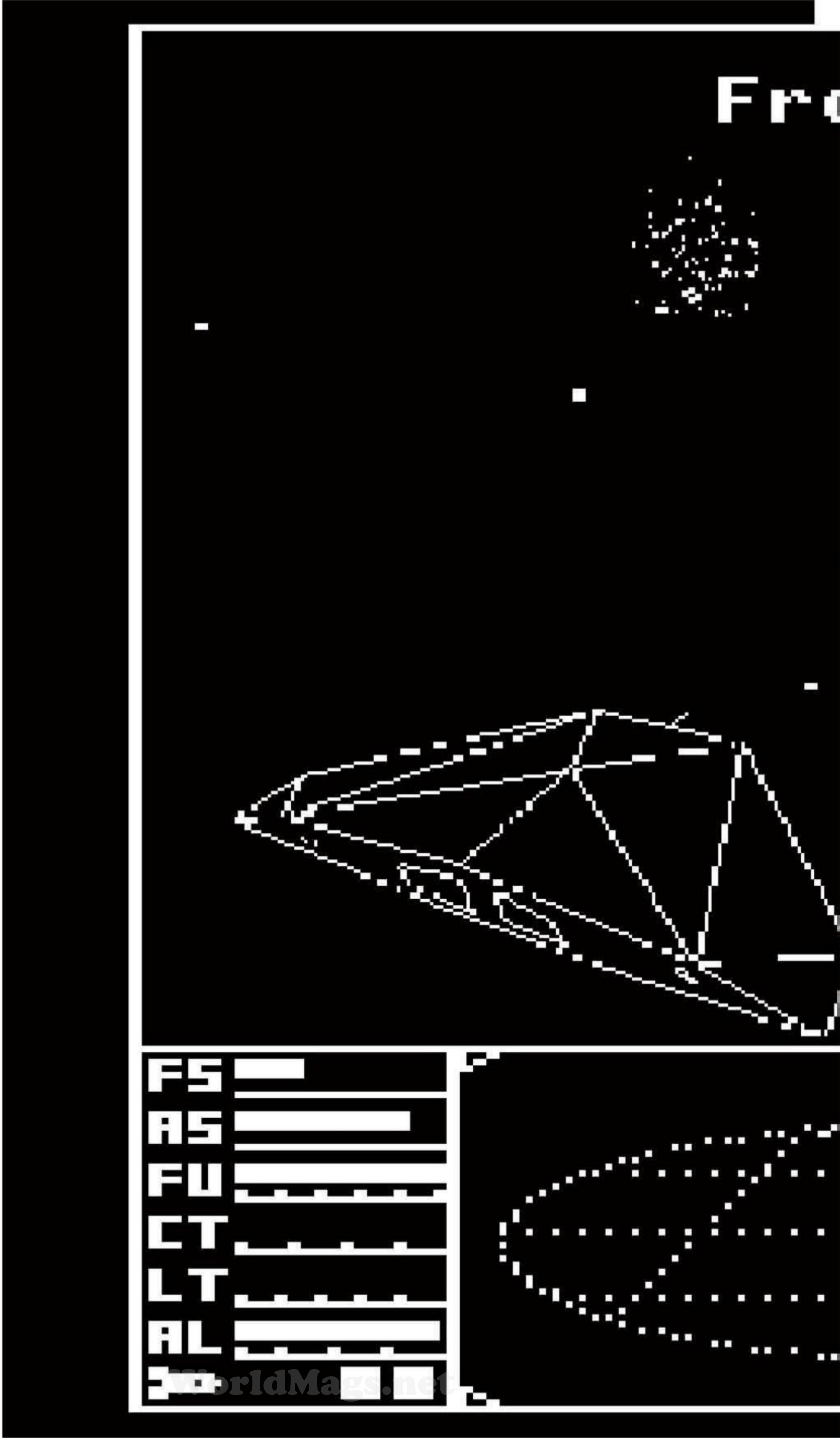
It's a testament to the sheer potency of Bell and Braben's *Elite* that even if you had the paltry Acorn Electron game you were still hooked from the moment your Cobra MKIII emerged from the Lave Coriolis space station and out into the big black. Compared to the all-conquering BBC disc version this insulting bare bones port lacked any special missions, no Blue Danube, a seriously pruned ship list, and it didn't even feature any suns for Chrissakes!

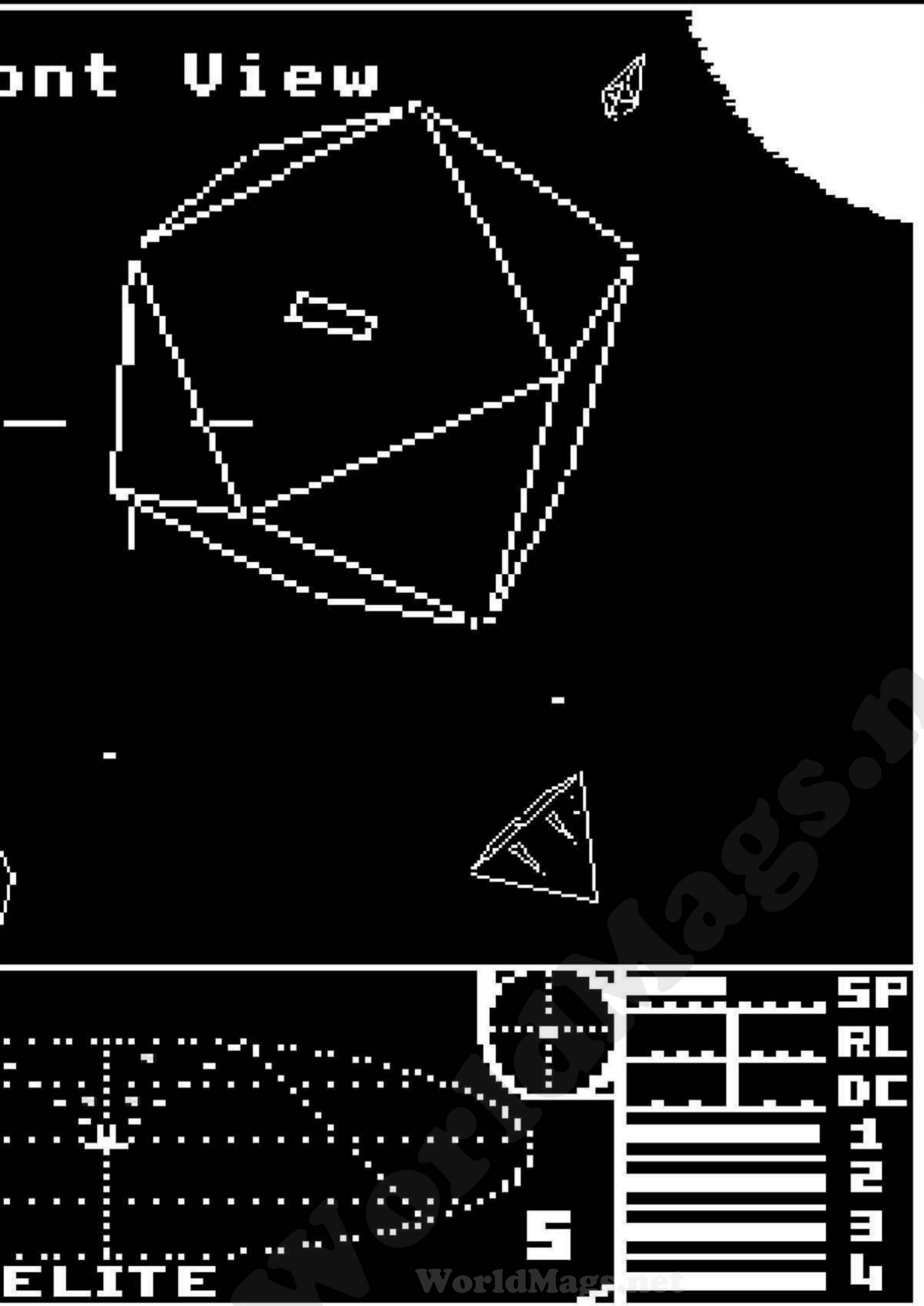
But it was still special.

Perhaps more than any other single game *Elite* has dominated my game time over the last 21 years, ever since Christmas 1984 when to my astonishment the last present in the sack was not a *Return Of The Jedi* Speederbike, but the lavishly presented Space Trader's Flight Training Manual accompanying the white label cassette. My friend Bill Hearn was right, this *was* the best game I would ever play.

Even today *Elite* still stands proud as a supremely playable space trading adventure; its quaint wireframe graphics allow your imagination to run riot, and the open-ended gameplay leaves you free to explore space as a pirate, a trader, a miner, a rogue, a hero or a bounty hunter. I like the fact that not just anybody can handle the flight controls, you have to put the effort in. There's the technical genius of the scanner, the trading element, which teaches you the value of money, the intense ship-to-ship combat and that terrifying shriek as enemy lasers penetrate your raw energy banks prior to detonation.

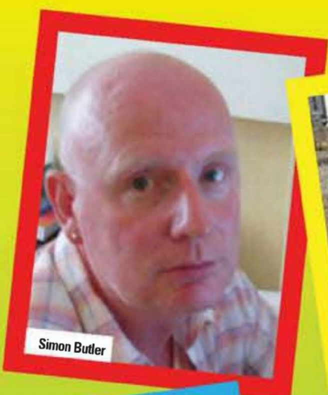
Since '84, countless iterations have been released – BBC, Spectrum, Amstrad, C64, Atari ST, Amiga, NES, and even (whisper it) a distinctly nefarious Game Boy Advance version, and despite only minor differences to the basic formula, die-hard fans typically own three or four versions on various formats. The Acorn Archimedes version is generally accepted as the best among purists because it's the ultimate evolution of the species. While technically it is 'the daddy', in my experience, the best version is always the one that first took your breath away…




ont View
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ELITE

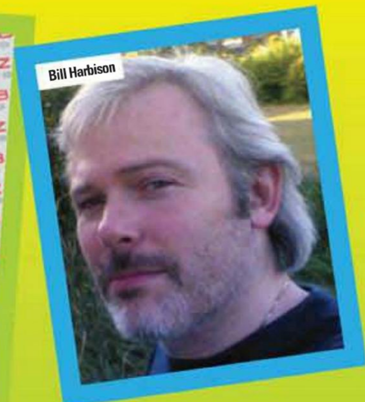
THE SPECTRUM LEGENDS

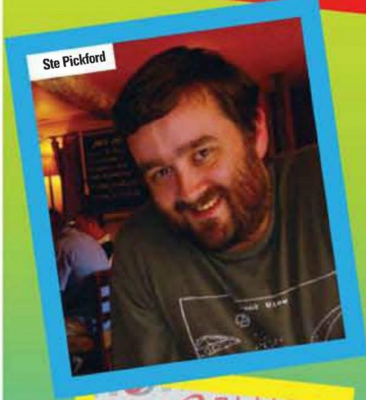
REGARDLESS OF WHETHER YOU LOVED OR LOATHED THE ZX SPECTRUM, THERE CAN BE NO DENYING THAT THE 8-BIT MACHINE REMAINS AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR GAMING HISTORY. RETRO GAMER DECIDED TO TRACK DOWN SEVERAL CLASSIC SPECTRUM CODERS TO FIND OUT JUST WHAT MADE SIR CLIVE'S MACHINE SO WONDERFUL...

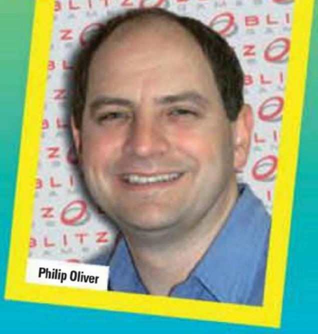

Simon Butler


Jon Ritman


Andrew Oliver


Bill Harbison


Ste Pickford


Philip Oliver

Q. What are your fondest memories of the days when the Spectrum ruled?

Simon Butler: There are almost too many fond memories from those days. Bargain games for a few quid that were better than a lot of the dross doled out these days. By 'better' I mean value for money, and enjoyment value. Also, making up the rules as we went along – that was fun. We had no one telling us how things should be done because no one had done it before. I suppose we were the 'avant-garde'.

Matthew Smith: The fact that arcades were flourishing gave home computer games a lot of their appeal. The newness of everything made us feel we could do things that weren't possible before.

Jon Ritman: That's a hard one. If I can only pick one moment, it has to be when I introduced my very first AI program to *Match Day* – a whole ten lines of code. The rules were a) If you haven't got the ball run at it and b) If you have got the ball kick it up the pitch. Bear in mind that I was bricking it at the idea of writing AI and you may appreciate my tears of relief when it scored against me in the first ten seconds.

Philip Oliver: Checking the charts each week as we always had games in the top ten! On a personal front... taking a gorgeous girl I'd just met into WHSmiths to show her what I did for a living. I took her to the Spectrum games shelf, looked for a *Dizzy* game and picked it up to show it to her. As I did so, a kid standing there said, "that's a great game, you should buy that". She's now my wife, but I'd like to think it's not down to that particular moment!

Ste Pickford: Probably before I started making games [1986], when I was just a fan, saving my pocket money up to buy the latest Ultimate game. The games that stick in my memory are those that managed to frighten you. That's something that doesn't happen in games these days, and perhaps can't happen with the level of detail and realism we've got now. There isn't space to use your imagination so much in modern games, which is where the strongest emotions come from, in the same way that modern movies can never be as scary or spooky as old black-and-white films.

I remember being terrified by a head that appeared in a bush in *Tir Na Nog*. I'd been walking around for hours – getting nowhere in the game – when this floating head briefly appeared then disappeared. It scared me out of my skin. I never got to the bottom of it, and it might even have been a bug, but I felt I'd encountered a taste of the primal magic of the game world.

I remember a Hewson game called *Avalon* that had a similar effect. It was very ambitious in terms of the amount it tried to move around the screen and, consequently, a bit ropey, but its flaws added to its charm and I can remember fear as I ran between floaty-walled rooms chased by monsters.

Elite was another game that had a strong effect on me where I was really caught up in the game world. Police ships were terrifying, and getting caught in witch space when going through hyperspace was a genuinely frightening experience.

Bill Harbison: My fondest memory was messing around with games that I had and changing the graphics. I remember typing out a *Donkey Kong* clone that was printed in a magazine and not being impressed with the graphics (basically guiding a mouse up ladders toward a piece of cheese). I decided to do my own, complete with chest-beating Kong. I even went as far as drawing the cover for the cassette box. I also hacked into *Rebelstar Raiders* and changed all the soldiers into space marines. It kept me off the streets.

"PROGRAMMERS COULD TAKE RISKS BECAUSE THE MONEY INVOLVED WAS SO LOW" JON RITMAN

Andrew Oliver: Every month would see new types of games released. It was a big time for creativity and originality.

David Jones: Just being able to write code when I felt like it and not having to worry about schedules or bosses. Knowing that if I thought a particular feature was amusing that I didn't have to justify it to a producer. At the time I didn't realise how valuable these things were, but I've worked on teams since then and nothing that I've been able to write as part of a team has come close to the level of reviews I managed when I was writing on my own.

Q. What has been your greatest ever Spectrum triumph and why?

Chris Stamper: In the early days we did almost everything connected with making games for the Spectrum. One of the greatest challenges was trying to find space in our already cramped office to store the latest delivery of tapes. At one time we estimated that we had over a ¼ million tapes stored in our offices in Ashby-de-la-Zouch; they were everywhere in every room, from floor to ceiling, and even up one side of the stairs. We consider the fact that we orchestrated everything in those early days, and weren't buried alive by a mountain of tapes, to be a triumph.

SB: Though I only did the backstory, the character design and the poster design, I enjoyed my time with *Shadowfire*. I got a kick out of *Neverending Story* and *Hunchback: The Adventure*. I enjoyed my solo days with Ian Weatherburn, annoying though he was. We were a good team until his companion Roy Gibson reared his head and then things went pear-shaped.

JR: *Head Over Heels* because it was so well liked and I still get fan mail thanking me for it – it was a lot of fun to design as well.

PO: We developed a way of programming the Spectrum via an Amstrad CPC6128. The electronic device was called SPlink. It enabled us to write games for the Spectrum very efficiently. We had a disk drive for storage, had the source code stored and developed on the Amstrad and the object code running on the Spectrum and no cassette tapes – except when it came to mastering the final game.

SP: Many people have fond memories of *Feud*, but I enjoyed making the Amstrad graphics more than the Spectrum ones, so I can't say that one. I'd have to say the very first Spectrum graphic I ever drew for a game. It was my first day at Binary Design, aged 16, and I was assigned to a darts game that had just started. I was using my brother's 'sprite editor' program and I drew a large animated hand holding a dart based on my own right hand. The game, *180*, was good, and did well, and the animated hand was a unique to our game – other darts games used to light up each number or segment of the board in sequence, and you had to press a button to stop it on the number you wanted. Years later, I'd meet people in the pub who'd played *180*, and I only had to waggle my right hand at them for them to recognise it from the game.

BH: *Chase HQ* was the most rewarding game I worked on, simply because technically it was superior to even the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga versions. Myself and John O'Brien [*Chase HQ* programmer] even received a fan letter – just one – from a very nice chap saying how much he enjoyed the game and offering his congratulations to us for doing such a great job on the conversion.

AO: It has to be *Dizzy*, but more specifically *Fantasy World Dizzy*, the third in the series. It was the last we made by ourselves. It introduced the family, had more story-like puzzles and tasks, and went straight to No 1 and remained in the charts for over a year.

DJ: I was pleased with the Windimation system as used on *Knight-Tyme*. I'd built in all sorts of tricks and data compression to cram more in to the game and as a result I'd been able to keep most of the 128K features on the 48K version.

Q. What's your favourite Spectrum game?

SB: There are far too many to mention. Obviously the Ultimate classics are there, but I liked *Chuckie Egg* and *Tir Na Nog*, *Zombie Zombie*, *3D Ant Attack*. It's actually impossible to pick one game and say, 'this one is better than all the others'. We were spoilt for choice.

MS: *Elite*. Squeezing a galaxy into 48k is a remarkable achievement and I like the idea of flying my own ship. I've been an urban spaceman since I was allowed to stay up and watch the Apollo missions.

JR: Where do I start – I can't pick just one, so I will list a few: *Knight Lore*, *Spindizzy*, *Xeno* (I think it was called that) and *Ant Attack*. There were several more, but I suspect the brain cells that held their names died a decade or more ago.

PO: Once the Spectrum was out we spent most of our time coding, however, I do remember seeing the isometric 3D game, *Alien 8*, by Ultimate Play the Game and being amazed at what they had squeezed out of a Spectrum. We were leading coders at the time and just couldn't understand how they were doing it.

SP: Impossible to say – there were so many great games over the years. The games I played the most were *Penetrator*, *Elite*, *Knight Lore*, *Chuckie Egg* and *The Lords Of Midnight*, but there were dozens more.

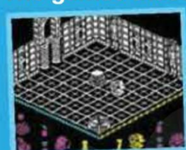




» If only *Head* had a laser gun for destroying this wall. The game would have been a lot easier…

LOADING DISC ONE…

The games that made the legends famous



HEAD OVER HEELS (JON RITMAN)
While Ritman and Drummond had impressed the gaming world with their take on *Batman*, it was their amazing follow-up that everyone remembers fondly. Filled to the rafters with incredible level design, some devilishly tricky puzzles and beautifully designed sprites, it's easy to see why Ritman is so pleased with the final product.

180 (STE PICKFORD)
While Spectrum already had its share of darts games, none of them placed you in control of a wobbly dart-throwing hand – until Pickford's *180* came along. Filled with fun touches (special mention goes to the pissing dog) *180* is an enjoyable game that's a lot better than it has any right to be. After all, darts games are supposed to be boring, right?



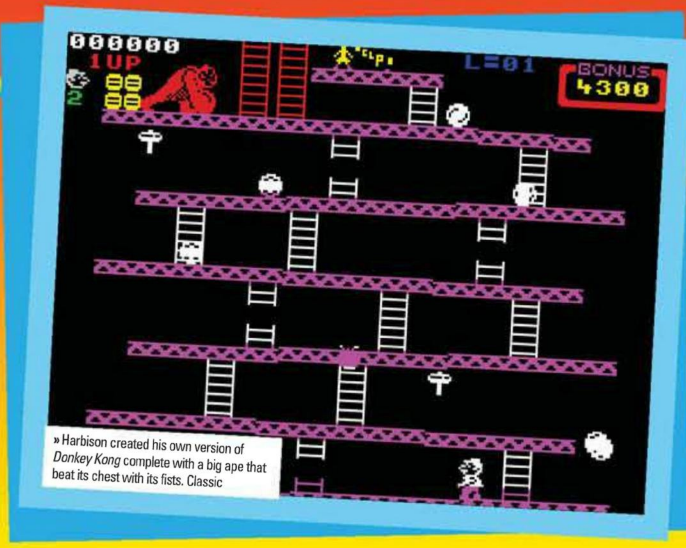


DIZZY (THE OLIVER TWINS)
While *Dizzy* wasn't the brothers' first title, it's easily their most important. While a little rough around the edges, *Dizzy* proved to be an extremely popular game that soon spread via word of mouth. By the time *Treasure Island Dizzy* was released, interest in the character was so great that it instantly went straight to the number one spot in the multiformat charts.

SHADOWFIRE (SIMON BUTLER)
Shadowfire proved an interesting blend of genres, and was like nothing else available on Spectrum when it was released in 1985. An icon-driven experience, you controlled six characters each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Beautifully designed and with a tight 100 minutes, *Shadowfire* shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.



THE SPECTRUM LEGENDS



» Harbison created his own version of *Donkey Kong* complete with a big ape that beat its chest with its fists. Classic

BITE-SIZE BIOGRAPHY OF A SPECTRUM LEGEND... PART ONE

THE OLIVER TWINS

The Oliver twins first began dabbling with games when their elder brother bought himself a Sinclair ZX81. The brothers eventually moved onto a Dragon 32 and after their first "type in" program appeared in an issue of *Computer & Video Games* they quickly purchased their very own BBC Model B. Their first game, *Gambit*, was published after the brothers won a competition on *The Saturday Show* in 1984 and before long they had several games published and eventually moved on to the Amstrad CPC.

After creating several games for budget labels such as Players, the twins met the Darling brothers at the ECTS of September 1985. The collaboration with Codemasters lasted for many years, with *Dizzy* easily being one of the main highlights of both the brothers and Codemasters.

Upon leaving Codemasters in 1993, the brothers began freelancing for several big publishers including Acclaim and BGM before they eventually launched their own company, Interactive Studios, which is now known as Blitz Games.

CHRIS STAMPER

Christopher Stamper and his brother Timothy first formed Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd back in 1982. Initially creating coin-op conversion kits – Chris had previously taken a job at a games manufacturer where he had repaired and created old arcade boards – the brothers soon began trading as Ultimate Play the Game and released hits such as *Jetpak*, *Psst*! and *Cookie*.

While the brothers continued to have hits with games such as *Sabre Wulf* and *Knightlore*, they were becoming increasingly unhappy and were looking for a change of direction and a way to get out of the 8-bit computer market, which was becoming dominated by budget titles from the likes of Codemasters and Mastertronic.

Unbeknown to many in the industry, the brothers had picked up a Japanese Famicom back in 1983 and, after working on the machine for some eight months, eventually set up a new company called Rare that would deal exclusively with NES games. After selling off Ultimate to US Gold, the brothers moved into new premises and also set up Rare-Coin-It in the US and went to work. Rare's first NES title, *Slalom* appeared in 1987 (coincidentally, the last year an Ultimate Play the Game title was released) and in the space of six short years it had released nearly 50 titles.

After a close relationship with Nintendo, Rare eventually announced that it had become a first-party developer and would make games exclusively for Nintendo. Despite finding great success with the *Donkey Kong Country* games on the Super NES, it was the N64 where Rare really shone and it released hit after hit.

All good things must come to an end, though, and on the day after Rare's first and only GameCube title, *Starfox Adventures* was released, Microsoft announced that it had bought the Twycross-based developers for a cool $350 million. So far, Rare's early output on both the Xbox and 360 have met with mixed reviews, but recent titles like the excellent *Viva Piñata* and *Jetpac: Refuelled* (an adaptation of Ultimate's original Spectrum hit) look like restoring Rare to its former glory.

DAVID JONES

David Jones first became interested in computers when he discovered the Video Genie (a cheap Tandy TRS-80) in 1979. Intrigued by the possibilities that lay before him, he immediately started coding games in basic. After being made redundant Jones decided to start working for himself and began programming for the Sinclair Spectrum, although he assembled all the actual code on his TRS-80 and transferred the data to his Spectrum, mainly because he wasn't a huge fan of the Spectrum's rubber keyboard.

A chance meeting with Albert Owen of Procom Software meant that Jones's first game, *Bonkers*, was eventually released in 1983. Two years later, and with Procom in financial difficulties, Owen suggested that Jones's new adventure, *Finders Keepers*, should be released under another software label.

The game was snapped up by Mastertronic and was an immediate success, selling over 300,000 copies. Jones soon got to work on a sequel and over the next three years he created three more titles.

Although he eventually moved over to consoles and worked for companies such as Psygnosis and Acclaim, Jones finally left the industry in 2002. While he's not shown any interest in returning, he has mentioned the

BH: Favourite games would have to be *Elite*, *Match Day II*, *Hypersports*, *Highway Encounter* and *The Great Space Race* (only kidding – remember that one?).

AO: I was always fond of Ultimate Play The Game's back catalogue. Games like *Alien 8*, *Sabre Wulf* and *Knight Lore* were creative and very professionally put together.

DJ: That's a difficult question as I often spent more time writing than playing. I was writing assembly code before the Spectrum was launched so I didn't spend much time playing before I began writing for it. I played more games on my TRS-80 while I was learning to program. You might as well ask a plumber what his favourite plumbing installation is. Obviously I played all the well-known titles, but it was mostly to see what everybody else was up to.

MS: It placed a powerful machine in the hands of a wider audience than ever before. The rubber keys were an ergonomic boon.

JR: It was a period we'll never have again; programmers could take risks with game design just because the money involved was so low. Many unusual ideas were born.

PO: It was like a console, because it was cheap, standardised and very accessible, but it was a fully programmable computer. The combination got kids hooked on games and then many got curious and wondered what they could do with it. This became the starting point for many of today's games programmers and a great deal of the UK's leading industry talent & figures including Phil Harrison, Head of Worldwide Game Studios for Sony.

> "DEAD-FLESH KEYS GAVE YOU THE SCREAMING AB-DABS, BUT IT WAS THE PLAYSTATION OF THE TIME"

Q. What did the Spectrum contribute to the gaming world?

SB: Creativity and enthusiasm that has all but disappeared from the industry today. It spawned a generation of coders and artists who have gone on to some dizzying heights while others have just disappeared. It generated thousands of gamers who were passionate about games in a way that is missing with today's console titles.



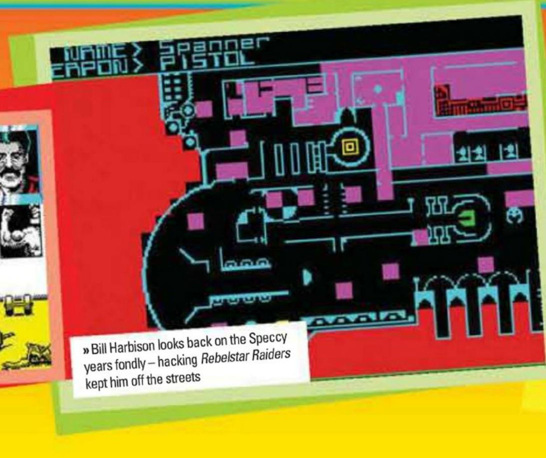
» Quite possibly one of the greatest Speccy ports ever created and it's all thanks to Bill Harbison

SP: Invention. It was a time when the world of videogames wasn't dominated by licences and sequels. Developers were allowed to create videogames rather than merchandise and promotional items for Hollywood and major sports authorities. There was an incredible outpouring of ideas and concepts because of this, particularly on the Spectrum because of its more flexible architecture.

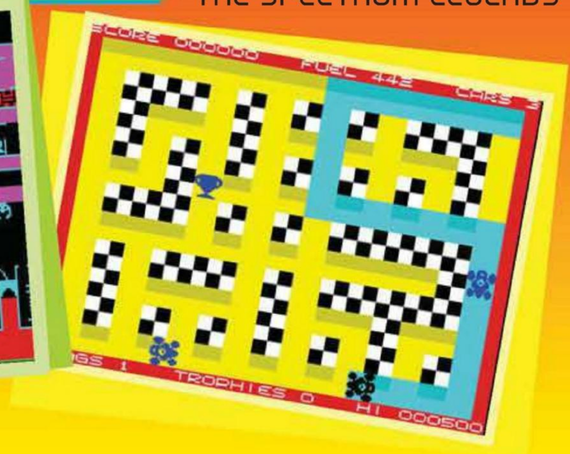
The Commodore 64 and the other American home computers had hardware features to help you make games – character screens, smooth scrolling, hardware sprites and so on. While on the face of it these features should make these computers better game machines, in practice they actually limited the range of games on those machines to only those suited to sprites floating over a scrolling character background.

Spectrum, on the other hand, merely had a bitmap screen and a processor. If you wanted to move a sprite or scroll the screen, you had to write the code yourself to do it. This had the advantage





» Bill Harbison looks back on the Speccy years fondly – hacking *Rebelstar Raiders* kept him off the streets



of filtering out the worst programmers – many of whom ended up on C64 in my experience – as you had to be of a certain standard just to be able to move a sprite around the screen. It didn't impose any particular style of game, because nothing was easier to write than anything else. Sprites were hard, scrolling was hard, star fields were hard, 3D was hard – everything was equally hard.

Consequently, there were a massive variety of game styles, genres and graphical systems in use. I don't think any games machine has such an original, varied and interesting back catalogue.

BH: It contributed cheap home conversions of established arcade games and gave young programmers the chance to introduce hybrid genre games like the *Dizzy* series and the *Gargoyle* series including *Tir Na Nog*. They also brought fully 3D-shaded games to the home market ten years before the big consoles made 3D the norm.

AO: It created an environment where hobbyists could write games and sell them – something that we've sadly lost now. And it put Britain ahead in game development, as places like Japan and America never really had the same easy route from hobby to job.

DJ: Because of the limited graphics capabilities it was an ideal platform for developing gameplay, which is something that was missing in the first machines that came after the Spectrum.

Q. What was the most frustrating element of working with the Spectrum?

SB: Roy Gibson. Apart from that, I never got frustrated with the Spectrum. I loved it and still do now. It was my favourite machine and it helped me get into WAP game graphics 20 years later. I learned what I know about animation while developing for it and it gave me many, many happy hours of gaming fun.

MS: None that I can think of. I had mine slaved to a TRS-80 so none of the inconveniences affected me. The architecture of the machine was simple and well documented in the manual.

JR: Attributes!

PO: Cassette Tapes were very annoying! We always wished it was faster – but that's been the case of every computer in history! I wish Clive Sinclair had taken a royalty from all games produced like all consoles as this would have helped him stay in business and produce more cool games machines. Although the QL was flawed in so many ways – perhaps not!

SP: As an artist, the frustration was always with colour. Not only with the limit of only two colours per character square, but also with the limited palette of only eight colours – including black and white. All the other home computers could switch to more colourful modes, perhaps with bigger pixels but with more colours allowed in each character square, and a wider palette of colours. I used to dream of being able to draw something in orange. Another frustration about working on the Spectrum was using micro drives. The most unreliable storage medium ever invented. I used to have to draw every graphic in a game at least three times over the course of development because I'd lose files from the micro drives so frequently.

BH: The lack of colours on the screen and the low screen resolution. This meant that you were restricted creatively and unable to produce the quality of work you could visualise in your mind.

AO: Using the keyboard, and the tape drive. Generally people tried to write-to-write games on the Spectrum itself, which was very hard. If it crashed, you'd lose your work, and have to reload from tape. It was the few that hooked another computer to it. In our case, the Amstrad CPC, with decent keyboard and disc drive.

DJ: Very little. It had a very simple architecture and enough memory to write decent games. I'd be happy to write for it now if there was still a market for it.

> "I WISH CLIVE SINCLAIR HAD TAKEN A ROYALTY FROM ALL GAMES PRODUCED AS THIS WOULD HAVE HELPED HIM STAY IN BUSINESS" PHILIP OLIVER

SB: I have nothing but fond memories of the Speccy. The colours, or lack of, was annoying, but overall it was my machine of choice when developing or gaming.

Q. And the most rewarding?

MS: Being able to produce high-res, colourful graphics was the best part, compared to other systems at the time. The first machine I saw was an Apple 2, which was out of the price range of most British people. It was also nice to know that Spectrum games did no harm to the Balance of Payments Defecit (British industry was collapsing at the time).

JR: Simplicity of dealing directly with the hardware and the freedom to avoid any sort of operating system.

PO: The success of the Spectrum meant so many people had games machines. Before the Spectrum only real geeks had computers; when the Spectrum came along even girls had computers!

SP: I used to work on multiformat games – for Spectrum, Amstrad and C64. The Spectrum version ended up being the main version – the version you wanted to play. Because of the technical difficulties

LOADING DISC TWO...

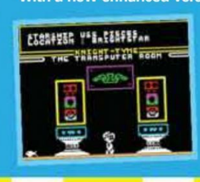
The games that made the legends famous



CHASE HQ (BILL HARBISON)
Along with *R-Type*, *Chase HQ* on Spectrum is one of the greatest coin-op conversions the machine has ever received. Boasting highly detailed visuals, wonderfully authentic gameplay and great speech (on the 128K version), *Chase HQ* proved that Sir Clive's humble machine was more than capable of mimicking a coin-op that cost thousands of pounds.

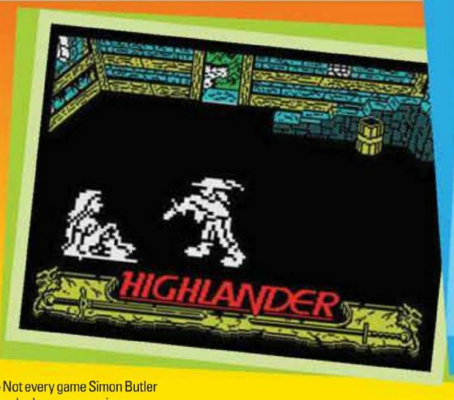
JETPAK (CHRIS STAMPER)
You never would have realised that this was the first game that the Stamper brothers released. Beautiful presentation, gorgeously detailed sprites and fast, frenetic gameplay all combined to create a dazzling debut that's still a dream to play today. And the reason we know it's still great? Why the Spectrum original has just been released (along with a new enhanced version) on Xbox Live Arcade.

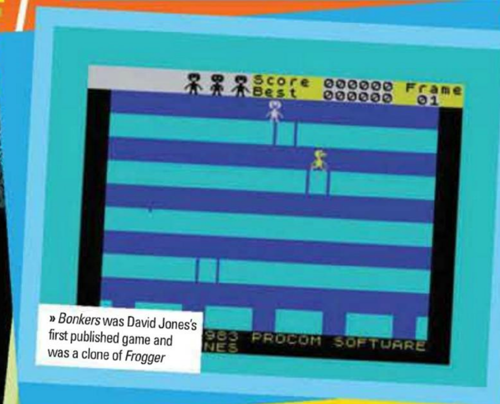




KNIGHT TYME (DAVID JONES)
While this is the third game in Jones' *Magik Knight* franchise, it just so happens to be the very best (especially if you can track down the superior Spectrum 128K version). Boasting plenty of new characters, a diverse range of locations and an amazing soundtrack by David Whittaker, *Knight Tyme* is a title that no Spectrum owner should be without.

THE SPECTRUM LEGENDS





» *Bonkers* was David Jones's first published game and was a clone of *Frogger*



» Not every game Simon Butler worked on was amazing, as *Highlander* proved

of working on the Spectrum, it tended to attract the better programmers, so that was one reason, but the Amstrad was too slow, and the C64 looked crap with its washed-out colours. The Spectrum also had the nicest keyboard for playing games on. So for all those reasons the Spectrum version of the games I worked on was always the one I played the most.

"FEW OF US WERE RICH ENOUGH TO OWN THEM ALL AS KIDS, SO THE HOME COMPUTER WE HAD WAS OUR FAVOURITE" STE PICKFORD

BITE-SIZE BIOGRAPHY OF A SPECTRUM LEGEND... PART TWO

SIMON BUTLER

Since his introduction to the industry when he worked on his first title, *Pedro's Garden* (1983) for the ill-fated Imagine Software, Butler has worked on many titles across multiple formats. Games such as *The Neverending Story*, *Hunchback: The Adventure*, *Total Recall*, *Worms* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3* are to name but a few. He's worked for such publishers as Ocean, Team 17, Vicarious Visions, Probe, Magnetic Fields and Atari.

JON RITMAN

The legendary Ritman appeared on the scene in 1981 when he released his first game on the Sinclair ZX81, *Namtir Raiders* (his surname spelt backwards). He has created several games that were converted to other platforms such as the Amstrad CPC, C64, MSX, Amstrad PCW and Atari ST. His portfolio consists of classics such as *Match Day I & II*, *Head Over Heels* and *Batman*. He's worked for Artic, Ocean and Rare/Titus.

STE PICKFORD

Maradona had the 'hand of God', but Ste had the 'hand of *180*' – an animation he created for the darts game. His brother John and he have had a roller-coaster ride during their time in the industry, from forming Zippo Games and developing titles for Rare on the NES to being owned by Rare, moving to Software Games and then leaving to form Zed Two (a nod to Zippo). In 2002 they had to sell to richer neighbours but Zed Two closed in 2004. Last year, they formed Zee-3 and are self-publishing their games online as The Pickford Brothers.

BILL HARBISON

Another great mind from the Ocean generation, Harbison worked on the amazing *Chase HQ*, as well as *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge*, *Jurassic Park* and *Lethal Weapon*. From Ocean he moved on to Time Warner Interactive, Candle Light and finally worked for Warthog through a company called Platinum Interactive. After some unpleasant times, he spent a few years out of the industry only to return 18 months ago to Rockpool Games.

BH: Because there were limitations on the graphical output of the machine, it was all the more impressive if you managed to use the ink and the colour attribute to your advantage and create an attractive loading screen. I remember being in a computer shop when *Chase HQ* was released. I was stood behind two kids who were watching the game load in from tape and when the screen came up on the TV one turned to the other and said, 'Wow! That is one righteous loading screen.' That was funny and at least he could count.

AO: Getting things working really quickly. Although writing assembler is very slow, you could spend a day, and get something moving around the screen quite quickly. There were also lots of 'hacker' type tricks that would make things very fast. Things like 'self modifying code' – that really is a no-no, but in those days, if it worked, it was cool. And even in code, it felt innovative.

DJ: Well, there was plenty of money floating about for those of us who could write for it! Most rewarding though was seeing the reviews after I'd written something that I was pleased with and seeing that other people liked my efforts.

Q. Why do you think the Spectrum remains so popular with gamers?

CS: The gameplay. Once you got past the technical aspects of doing what you wanted and because the graphics, although simple, took a major effort to make them great, you simply honed the gameplay. What really made the games special was that a larger percentage of the overall effort went into this; it made for some truly great and imaginative games.

SB: Because it's British. I've no idea really. There just seemed to be a glut of games out there with hundreds more just waiting to be released every month. Crash was our bible and there never seemed to be enough space for all the reviews. With no internet it was the only salvation if you needed a game tip or even better a map. It was small and black and sexy, and apart from the horrible dead-flesh keys, which gave you the screaming ab-dabs after a while – it was the PlayStation of the time. It kicked ass over C64 as far as I was concerned. There was a certain pompous attitude about Commodore development. Even though I did graphics for many C64 titles I preferred the Spectrum. You drew something, and if you were a halfway decent artist then it looked like what you intended. C64 graphics? Although he's one of my all-time favourite sprites, just look at Bruce Lee. I rest my case.

MS: It can only be the rubber keyboard. Seriously though, modern games have a sameyness about them. This is just a phase, as the current push towards physics acceleration will open up new avenues.

JR: It isn't. Just a few odd people think it is.

PO: It kick started the UK games industry and was 100% British from the quirky but brilliant entrepreneur Sir Clive Sinclair.

SP: Hmm. Nostalgia, I guess. It seems a pretty even split among people I meet – Spectrum or C64, with the odd Amstrad fan, and I've re-enacted the playground arguments in the office a few times. Very few of us were rich enough to own them all as kids, so whichever home computer we had was our favourite.

BH: It's because the Spectrum played such a big part in the lives of a whole generation of kids growing up in the Eighties and Nineties. It was there when they were growing up and we always look back rapturously on our childhood and how the sun was brighter and the grass was greener. It wasn't, but that's how we recall it.

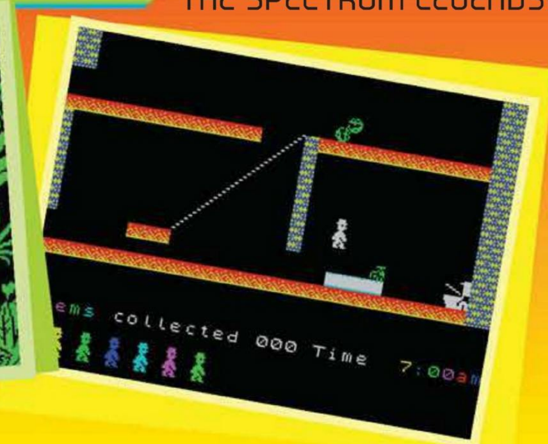
AO: It created so many new original gamers and started up the industry, certainly for the British.

DJ: It has to be the gameplay because it isn't the graphics. Well done Sinclair for putting it out there with the colour clash and everything though, because if they'd waited to develop a non-colour clash machine it might have missed the market and we'd all have been stuck with the Commodore 64. I could write 6502 code as





» The superb *Sabre Wulf*, easily one of Chris Stamper's finest gaming moments



well, but I had the set up for Z80 so I'd have been behind on writing my games and might not even have got around to it.

Q. Do you think bedroom coders can still exist in the industry?

SB: They'll never get rich, but as long as they enjoy what they do, turn out quality product, and entertain people then that's all that matters. The bastards who wear the suits have all-but destroyed the UK game development scene and have ensured that the days of the bedroom coders or the cottage industry development teams are over.

MS: They can, and with the internet, there is no reason why they can't flourish, in my opinion. The mainstream media has a tendency to devote all its column inches and airtime to big PR stunts from the established giants, but the specialist press will always give independents a fair crack of the whip.

JR: While not actually programming in my bedroom, it's only a few feet away. There are a few left who tend to work on very small projects such as embedded games and mobile games.

PO: Very tough, but *Darwinia* is one of those rare exceptions that proves it's just possible. But what's better these days is that people can realistically choose making games as a serious career and there are many large professional companies that they can join to do so. And unlike the "bedroom coders" they don't need to be masters of multiple disciplines and risk everything!

SP: I hope so, as I've become one. I think the mainstream videogame industry has lurched too far toward making only slick, high-budget, blockbuster-type products, and hasn't encouraged enough original, lower budget titles to come through to provide the ideas for the blockbusters of the future. There are creative developers within the industry who can't express themselves as part of a 60-man team working night and day to draw a thousand new kits for *FIFA 2007*, or to program the gearshift simulator for licensed car #37 in racing game #58. The only option for these people is to leave the industry to do something more rewarding, or to make games as an 'Indie'. So many developers are turning to Indie development that I think Indies and bedroom coders are going to become an accepted part of the world of videogames providing the stream of new ideas we used to get from regular games in the Spectrum days, but which seems to be missing from the modern videogame industry.

BH: In some ways it's easier for bedroom coders with the introduction of the internet. People can get the tools and resources they need, they can get advice on programming for all the way through the project, and when completed they can sell it direct to the customer. I don't think it's enough to make anyone a millionaire, but it can be a good living.

AO: It's difficult. The tools and platforms aren't really in place for it. It doesn't feel cool, when the market has so many huge, flashy games around. The gulf between what you can achieve on your own and what's in the market place seems too big. But, people must try, and we'd like to encourage that spirit to return.

DJ: No. Well, maybe, but they'd have to be clever as they would need to develop a lot more code to even get a simple game going. Maybe a company could produce a series of supported libraries that include a decent renderer, a resource system, external chipset interfaces etc. The best bet I see for a potential bedroom coder is to use Direct X to write the best game demo software they can and then use that as part of their CV to get in with a small development team.

Q. What do you think of the Spectrum games that are still being released by the likes of Jonathan Cauldwell?

SB: Unfortunately, I don't play any Spectrum games these days. I know precious little about the current Spectrum games, but friends who are 'in the know' tell me great things, so I suppose I should check them out.

JR: I haven't. I don't have a working Spectrum now but I do intend to get an emulator for my DS, and perhaps a GP2x if the pennies stretch that far.

JR: I had no idea.

PO: Sadly I had little time to play Spectrum games in the mid-Eighties, now I have a company of 175 staff and a family – I'm afraid I don't have any time! But if Jonathan is looking for a rewarding long-term career in a stable, friendly company of like-minded, skilled game developers he should get in touch.

SP: No, I've not played any of them. I think it's insane. The Spectrum is a difficult machine to write for, and incredibly limited. Why put yourself through the pain of making a Spectrum game now when you don't need to? If you're talented enough to make a finished Spectrum game, then you're talented enough to make a game that other people might play. Why hide away on a dead format?

BH: I'd not heard of Jonathan so I decided to Google him. It looks like a lot of fun, but I'm not sure how popular it is.

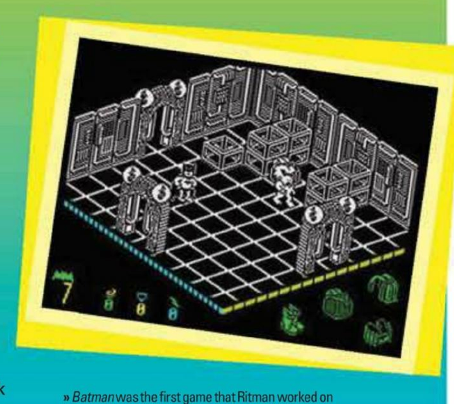
AO: I haven't played any of them. Way too busy. I applaud people who make this kind of effort, and hope these people get jobs making games. Even though it's hard work in the games industry, it's cool going to work and being able to create new games, and although some of the originality has been lost, there's many things like Live Arcade that should help bring it back. We're feeling very good about how the quality of games is getting better all the time, and we're being compared more and more to Hollywood. But we can overtake films.

"THE BASTARDS WHO WEAR THE SUITS HAVE DESTROYED THE UK GAME DEVELOPMENT SCENE; THE DAYS OF THE BEDROOM CODERS ARE OVER" SIMON BUTLER

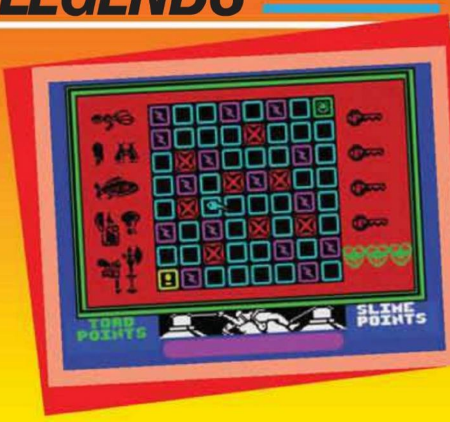
DJ: I wish them the best of luck with it and no, I haven't played them.

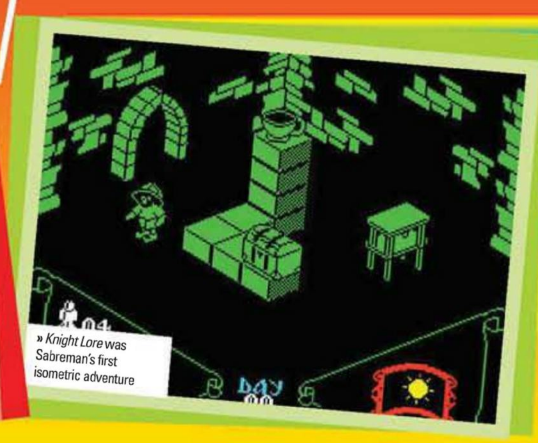
Q. What has been the defining moment of your career?

CS: I'm hoping that our careers aren't over yet, as we're currently working on some wonderful games, but there are many special memories, too numerous to recollect at this time, but with regards to the Spectrum, peeling the cellophane off the very first copy of *Jetpac* that we got back from duplicators, seeing it load, playing the game, and knowing that this was a real and saleable product was something I will never forget.



» *Batman* was the first game that Ritman worked on with friend Bernie Drummond




» *Knight Lore* was Sabreman's first isometric adventure





SB: I remember many years ago that Gary Bracey ran a computer store in Liverpool long before he became my lord and master at Ocean, and I called in with Ian Weatherburn to buy some blank discs. Gary's shop was cram-packed with kids, and he got me to autograph some copies of *Shadowfire*. While far from 'defining', it stuck with me. It was one of the first times I met Gary, and although it embarrassed me somewhat being put on the spot like that it made me realise that kids really enjoyed what I did for a living.

I recently got a job with a mobile games company working in France and the boss rattled off games I had worked on saying that I was one of the guys who was instrumental in him getting into the industry. Contrary to what my father always thought, maybe I haven't wasted the last 25 years of my life after all.

MS: It must be the excitement in the Bug Byte office when I brought in a half-finished *Manic Miner*, or maybe it was when I was in London receiving a Golden Joystick award. I have dabbled in other jobs, but nothing has ever generated this kind of enthusiasm and appreciation.

JR: *Match Day* – six months after a brief conversation with David Ward of Ocean (that I barely recalled) he phoned to say, 'that football game you were going to write, did you do it?' I then confirmed it was a couple of weeks from completion and he offered me a huge amount for it – well it seemed huge at the time.

"I THINK I'VE MADE EVERY MISTAKE IT'S POSSIBLE TO MAKE. I REGRETTED THEM AT THE TIME, BUT REGRET FADES" STE PICKFORD

PO: Yikes - that's a tough question. To be honest our success has come through lots of small steps over the last 25 years. Significant steps were getting hooked on *Pac-Man* ('81), Winning "The Saturday Show" ('83), Meeting the Darling Brothers ('85), as they were just starting Codemasters and *Dizzy*. After that we set up Blitz and everything has been planned and worked for, sadly no major lucky breaks, but we're still in the game! I guess we've been very fortunate to hire a lot of very talented and loyal staff that we now treat as "part of the family". More details of our early days can be found at www.OliverTwins.com.

SP: I hope it hasn't happened yet. I've never had a big hit game, and never made a lot of money, both of which I'm still working on. *Laughs* I'm still making games, and learning with every game I work on. The Pickford Brothers' latest game – *Naked War* – is the best game we've ever made, and I'm confident that the next game we write after that will be even better. I'm looking to the future, not the past.

BH: I think it was being invited with a few workmates to the press premiere of *Jurassic Park* at Leicester Square – it was certainly an experience.

AO: Probably having over ten UK number ones with Codemasters, and then setting up our own company.

DJ: I don't know really. I have a number of different careers. Maybe I'll knock out some more games and have a defining moment some time in the future. However, finding out from a member of the Crash review team that *Finders Keepers* would have been a Crash Smash (90% or greater overall review score), but that they were told to knock the review down to 89 ½ per cent because Mastertronic didn't advertise with them was very interesting. Sort of a defining moment, as I hadn't realised until that point that there was a certain amount of 'massaging' of the review scores based on the level of publisher advertising. It meant that I knew my review scores were always accurate or lower than they should be, but it also meant that I could take other high reviews with a pinch of salt if that publisher had a lot of adverts in that issue of the magazine.


» A little game called *Match Day* proved the defining moment of Jon Ritman's shining career

Q. And finally, what was the biggest mistake of your career, if any?

SB: Probably not learning one of the many 3D packages out there. I wouldn't have bounced around the industry as much as I have, and would have had a lot more stability in my life. But I was a 2D guy back then and that's what I am today. I'm the last dinosaur.

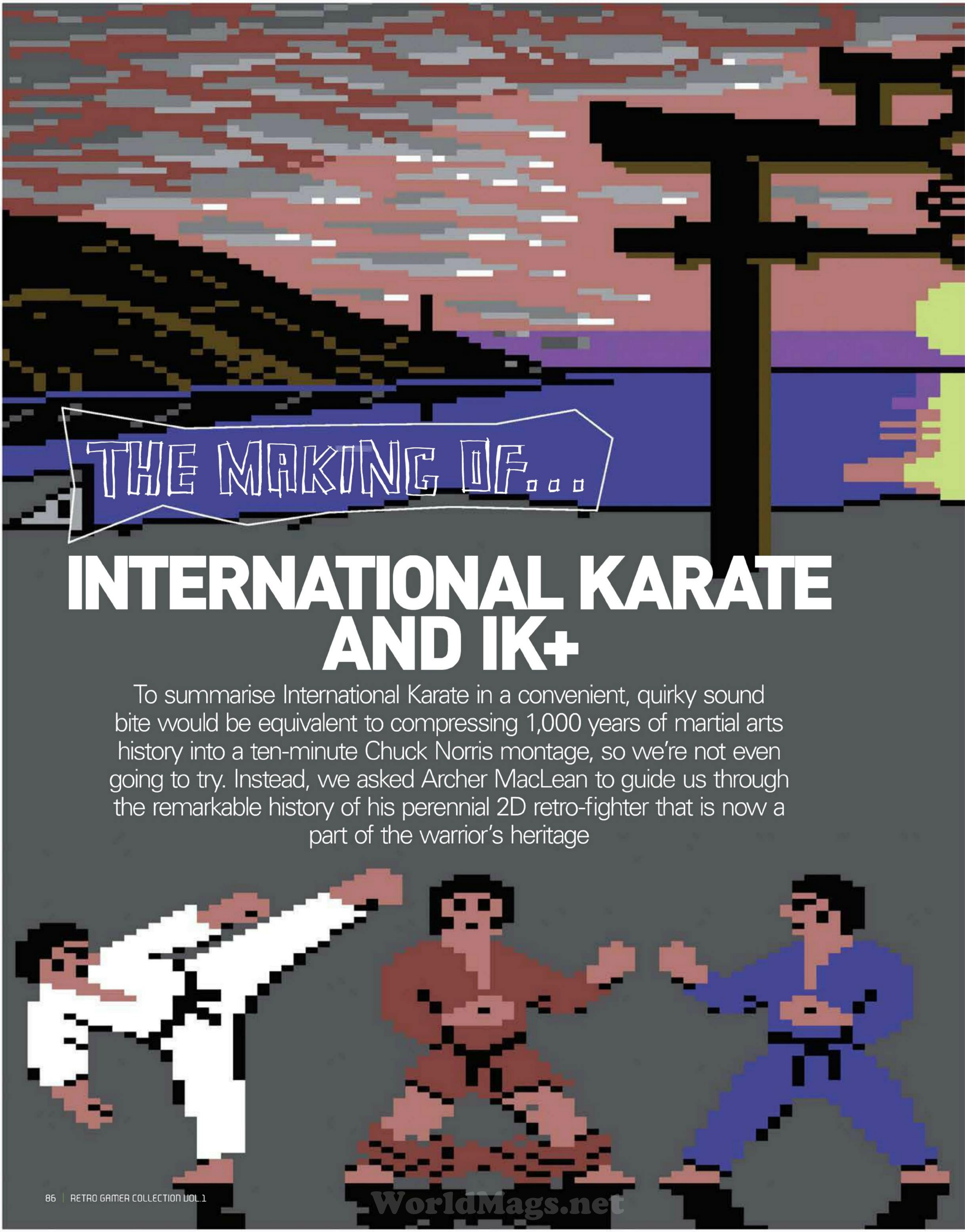
JR: I should have started up my own company early and published myself.

SP: I can't really pick anything. That's not to say that I haven't made any mistakes – I have. I think I've made every mistake it's possible to make in this business. I regretted them at the time, but with hindsight the regret fades. Every mistake I've made has taught me something which has helped me later.

I'm pretty good at making games now, after 20 years, because I've learnt the hard way how not to make games. I've made mistakes in business and missed opportunities, but every mistake has led me to where I am today. Okay, I'm skint, but I'm making the best game I've ever made, and enjoying every minute of it, and I'm looking confidently to the future.

BH: Leaving the industry a few years ago after the local job scene dried up. I spent 18 months doing a proper job, and hated it. Thankfully, I'm back in the industry working at Rockpool Games in Manchester with a few of my old colleagues, some of whom I've known for over 18 years.

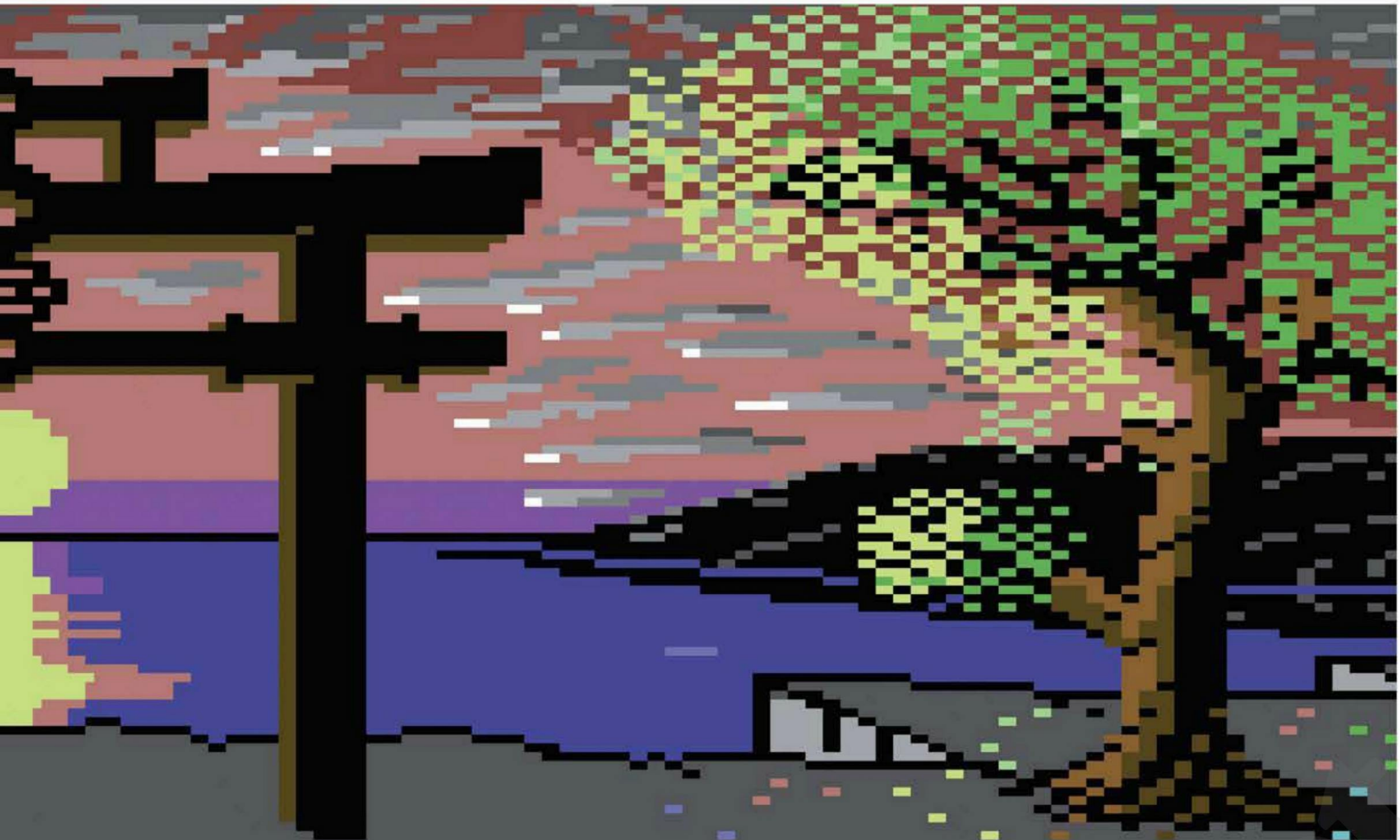

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THE MAKING OF...

INTERNATIONAL KARATE AND IK+

To summarise International Karate in a convenient, quirky sound bite would be equivalent to compressing 1,000 years of martial arts history into a ten-minute Chuck Norris montage, so we're not even going to try. Instead, we asked Archer MacLean to guide us through the remarkable history of his perennial 2D retro-fighter that is now a part of the warrior's heritage



"I JUST DECIDED TO MAKE IT A THREE-PLAYER SIMULTANEOUS GAME... AS SOON AS I HAD THIS IDEA I KNEW IT WAS A GOOD ONE AND COULDN'T WORK FAST ENOUGH TO MAKE IT HAPPEN" ARCHER MACLEAN

International Karate was born into the golden age of the fighting game, when the one-on-one filled the stale arcade air with the splash of an over-full coin box and the jeers of blood-hungry players. Coin-op cabinets were tested by fire as savage gamers mimicked their on-screen counterparts, assailing joysticks and buttons with the fury that only a beat-'em-up can provoke. Developers were fighting their own battles to be the first to bring this passion to our home systems.

In 1985, System 3 was desperate to save a struggling production it hoped would join the fighting game fray on the software shelves and introduce Archer MacLean to the 8-bit fighting world. He told us how the journey began.

"I was originally asked in about August '85 to just do some C64 graphics routines for a karate game, as the original programmer and artist had walked out on the project. Gossip said he'd apparently not been paid. I took one look at the minimal amount of early Spectrum *IK1* work and thought it was pretty awful, in fact really dire, and had no interest in trying to convert it and improve it. Afterwards we all went to the pub and there was an arcade karate machine in there, and I was more or less asked if I could do something just like it. I hadn't seen it before although it was clear where the Spectrum's game structure had come from. I played it for five minutes and simply thought I could do a much more fluid quality job if I just redid everything myself whilst sticking to a karate type theme of timed bouts of fighting."

These difficulties caused System 3 to falter and, by the time MacLean was at the helm, fighting games were causing a sensation on the 8-bit computer game charts, with Melbourne House's *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, firmly in the lead.

"Around the same time, *Fist* came out and was a huge, huge hit and I remember fondly playing it to death over and over again. It was seriously addictive and I take my hat off to Greg Barnett for making it such an incredible, fun game. I played various others like *Yie Ar Kung Fu* but *Fist* was the best at that point," MacLean explains, happy (and confident) to acknowledge his inspiration.

"I started working on a whole new game structure and adapted it into my proven *Dropzone* game shell. I set about drawing and re-drawing various backdrops and animations, some of which I was asked to do and some of which are unique to the *IK1* versions I wrote. I also wrote various simple tools to allow me to animate frames together and cue sound effects to trigger at exactly the right frame time."

EMPTY HAND OVER FIST

Martial arts are synonymous with speed, control and agility, and any game basing itself around an established fighting system had to encompass those core principles. Most managed to deliver one or two, though all three were hard to find neatly packaged in a single beat-'em-up. Even the hallowed *Karate Champ* caused its share of frustration as the two combatants shuffled sluggishly back and forth while trying to find their fighting distance. *International Karate* suffered no such lethargy.

"The biggest challenge was making the players move and react sensibly, with increasing conviction as the difficulty level increased. Also, I wanted to make the knuckle of a hitter strike the actual nose pixel of the opponent, and none of this *Street Fighter* stuff where you can be miles out and the guy still drops. So I wrote another graphics tool to allow me to quickly set various x/y offsets from each animation frame's corner.

"Except for being told to stick to the formula of rounds/points/bonuses, etc, the *International Karate* content was created

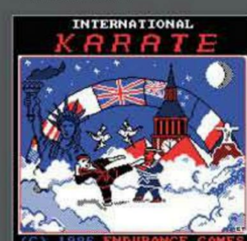


» Not only did the Spectrum version of *International Karate* look a lot worse, it played like hell

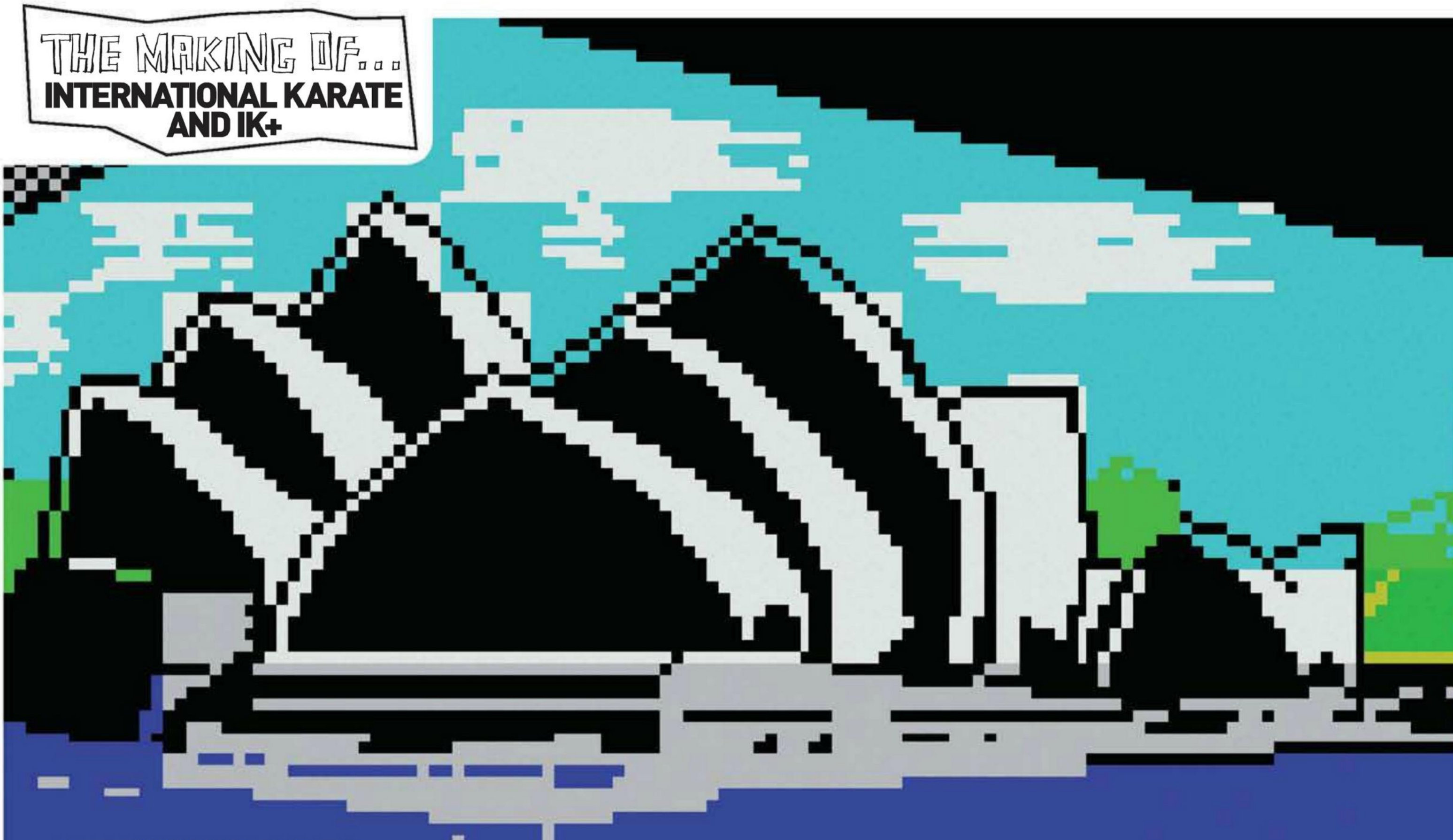
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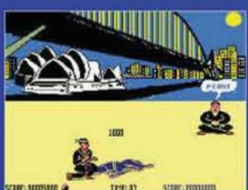


- » **PUBLISHER:** SYSTEM 3
- » **DEVELOPER:** ARCHER MACLEAN
- » **RELEASED:** 1986/7
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



INTERNATIONAL KARATE AND IK+





» Ported from the lacklustre Spectrum version, *International Karate* on the CPC never stood a chance

OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:

INTERNATIONAL KARATE
IK+
INTERNATIONAL KARATE 2000
INTERNATIONAL KARATE ADVANCE
IK+ GOLD

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DROPZONE
SYSTEMS: C64, ATARI 800
YEAR: 1984

JIMMY WHITE'S WHIRLWIND SNOOKER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC
YEAR: 1991

MERCURY
SYSTEMS: PSP
YEAR: 2005



from scratch by me and reversed into my proven Atari and C64 game-shell that I'd used on *Dropzone*. This wasn't a conversion from the Speccy version. You've only got to run side by side emulators to see that."

What really made *International Karate* stand out was its fighters. The difference between its characters and those from the increasing number of fighting games was the array of subtle idiosyncrasies written into the background; characters with a distinct personality were a new and ingenious concept that allowed players to identify with the fighters in a whole new way.

The skilled alacrity of the combatants granted a feeling of impending suspense from the second each round began, akin to the quick draw duelling of a Western. A flurry during close-quarter fighting could evaporate into a game of full contact chess when the distance extended into a standoff. No small wonder that such a polished game would catch the attention of jealous rivals.

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We should compare *International Karate* to Technos's 1984 *Karate Champ*; if it was a simple matter of *Karate Champ* being a self-styled, unique game that transcended genre – like *Pac-Man* for example – the lawsuit Data East brought against the US release of *International Karate* (published locally by Epyx as *World Championship Karate*) might have made an equitable argument. Initially, the courts thought it did.

"This was in the days before the internet or magazines began covering games from outside the UK and I was completely unaware of the USA lawsuit until one day I got a curious call from the States asking why it was so similar to *Karate Champ* in terms of look and feel. Despite being originally asked to complete the work on a totally different game, I did go off and evolve all the programming, graphics and sound effects myself, and pointed out that a karate game with two karate players wearing red and white karate suits fighting within the familiar rules of a bout of karate is bound to look similar to any other game featuring karate players wearing karate suits and doing karate moves in timed bouts of karate fighting! I think that's why the look and feel and rules became better defined. At a high level of abstraction it's easy to say that *Karate Champ* is like *Fist* is like *IK1* is like *Tekken* and so on. They all feature bouts of timed karate-type gameplay."

Epyx was ordered to recall the product. The decision was appealed against, however, and was summarily overturned when the judge declared that the overly generic concept of a karate bout, regardless of the inevitably similar features between different games, could not be copyrighted.

By the time the lawsuit had helped a second round of *IK* sales to peak, software developers were seeking a way to refresh the concept. Over the years, there would be a plethora of variations on that original theme, yet the most immediate update was a simple idea. MacLean told us about his flash of multiplayer brilliance.

"*IK+* was an idea I had in a flash of inspiration whilst trying to solve the problem of having a game design where a dozen opponents would be seen seated around the fighting area, set in a dojo. This all came about after a conversation with Activision in mid '86, who asked if I could take fighting games to the next level. Anyway, I wanted the next player to get up and walk into the fighting area as the other went and sat down, or got carried off in pieces!" MacLean

THE SKILLED ALACRITY OF THE COMBATANTS GRANTED A SENSE OF IMPENDING SUSPENSE FROM THE SECOND THE MATCH BEGAN, MOST AKIN TO THE QUICK DRAW DUELLING OF A WELL HAMMED WESTERN



laughs while looking back at his time spent watching such antics in a real dojo. He continues, "then I just decided to make it a three-player simultaneous game, instead of one-on-one as with *IK1*. As soon as I had this idea I knew it was a good one, and couldn't work fast enough to make it happen, yet at the same time trying desperately to not tell anyone because it just seemed so simple for me to do – or anyone else!"

THREE TO TANGO

The problem with simple ideas is that realising them is invariably an intricate process, and players were expecting the same slick gameplay from the sequel they'd enjoyed in the original *International Karate*.

"The fun part was dealing with the technical limitations of having three different coloured, animated players on the screen whilst still making use of sprites rather than the slower conventional bit-plot/erase/refill method. I managed to make it happen quite quickly because the animation system from the two-player *IK1* on the Atari 800 version didn't use sprites, and it was extendable and could be used on the C64 with Sprite stuff as well, allowing three players to be drawn."

By their very nature these games must, above all else, be responsive; this was hindered by building cohesive animation frames between the vast array of available moves. Many a pixelised tooth has been sacrificed waiting for the central 'ready stance' to roll around before the next move could be executed, though *IK+* couldn't easily be accused of such lassitude.

"Another problem I had was how to squeeze all the animation frames into the available RAM. There was about 80 or 90 individual frames of movement. These could be flipped when the fighters turned the other way, and on the 16-bit versions the data could be dynamically changed to be one of eight different colours. Then I wanted the 'end' frame of a sequence to skip past the 'standing' frame and straight into the first frame of the next animation sequence without the fighter constantly returning to the default stance because it would slow down the game and make it appear less fluid, so I had to consider this when drawing all the frames."

A big part of the game's appeal is the incredible fluidity of the fighter's movements, particularly in comparison to many of the stiff, clunky graphics that brought down many beat-'em-ups. Other than the music, MacLean was a one-man team, yet nothing in the broad spectrum of game development suffered due to his resources, including the outstanding visuals.

"I used a slow motion, steady frame VHS player and watched the end scene of *Grease* with some bloke doing a sideways-on back-flip in a fairground. I laid cellophane on the TV screen and shrunk the size to match the pixel height needed on the computers, then just traced around the arms and legs. Using a pixel editor on the computer I would draw the player's outline before filling in the details. Another one I remember doing was the jump up double face kick. That came from a scene in *The Cannonball Run* where Jackie Chan is kicking the crap out of a load of bikers. He was wearing a white jump suit, which kind of made it easier for me to draw around!"

Despite its name, *IK+* was not particularly international, instead making good use of a single oriental courtyard backdrop sporting an atmospheric ocean vista, complete with rippling reflections and waves lapping at the shoreline. It was also replete with novelty animations to catch the corner of the player's eye while their fighter was laid out.

Periscopes, falling cherry blossom, crawling worms, descending spiders and



» The groovy Game Boy Color revamp of *International Karate*. It's like, totally outta' sight, man

IK+ GOLD

A return to the C64 in 2001 heralded the greatest *IK* update. A member of the German C64 demo sceners, The Dreams, decided it was time to help this game realise its potential. Wolfram Sang (known as Ninja from The Dreams) told us about the making of *IK+ Gold*:

"At one of the C64 parties I was bored, and saw the game was running. So I pressed the freeze button and had a look. 24 hours later I had the proof of my concept." Sang remembers.

As MacLean explained, adding that third player was a big task; making it user-controllable was even more intricate.

"The AI worked by putting simulated joystick movements to player three, so I suppressed it and sent the additional data to the game engine. Playing with three players has a lot of side effects, like how to start a game with all these player combinations. Also, the game hardly had any memory left; sometimes I had to recode built-in routines to free up bytes here and there, and the high score saver was tough as I needed to set up memory access so I could use C64's built-in disc routines without ruining the game. That nearly made me quit!"

Sang's patched disk contains info on how to build his SNES controller-to-C64 adaptor that uses the C64's joyports, leaving the user port free. *IK+ Gold* can be found at http://www.the-dreams.de/ik_gold.zip.



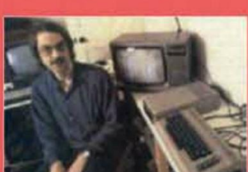
THE MAKING OF...

INTERNATIONAL KARATE AND IK+



MARTIAL MELODIES

Although Archer MacLean proved himself more than capable of tackling the majority of tasks when it came to creating a game, even he was happy to leave the music to revered SID maestro, Rob Hubbard (though subsequent 16-bit versions of the sequel were handled by David Lowe). Perhaps not remembered among Hubbard's most accomplished works, the theme tune to *International Karate* suited the gameplay extremely well, making brilliant use of pseudo-oriental instruments fused with a steady rock metronome (over ten minutes in length) that set the pace for the bouts perfectly. With the growing following of SID-based 'retro rock' music and concerts, *International Karate* and *IK+* have had their soundtracks compiled and remixed on numerous occasions, from techno and dance tracks to a full orchestral rendering at the 2005 Symphonic Game Music Concert, with orchestration and composition by Hubbard.



more frittered about in the background; even a *Pac-Mania* character made a cameo, chomping his way across the Zen garden. It was this kind of hidden detail and charm, alongside the monumental number of cheats and jokes, that endeared *IK+* to players across the board.

"The trouser-drop in *IK1* was only put in because I hate games that look static if the player isn't doing anything, so the little animations were added to beckon the player to join in. This proved to be a big hit with reviewers and players alike, so with *IK+* I just went overboard and put 50 or so cheat codes in. Some were small incidentals and some had a serious amount of code behind them. These days that would all be designed out because it would be seen as a waste of project time, whereas I think it's part of what made the old 8-bit games fun!"



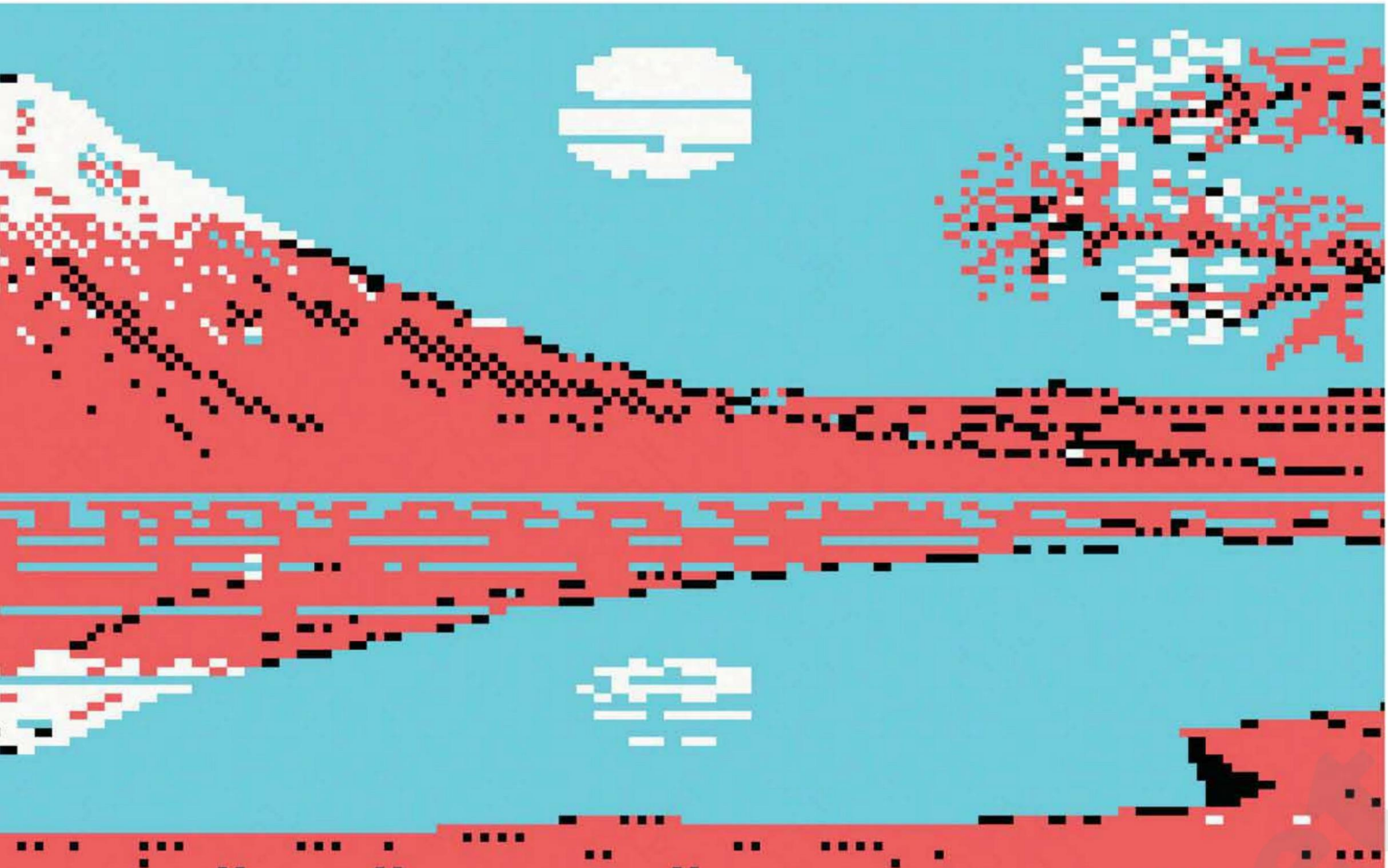
» *International Karate Advance* on the GBA – an update to the Color, but a far kiai from the C64

No good kung fu film is complete without badly dubbed sound effects and a game as watchable as it was playable needed exactly the right audio accompaniments to set the tone for battle. Naturally, *IK+* provided a cacophony of shrill war cries, the solid thump of bone on concrete and beautifully immodest Bruce Lee impressions.

"I have fond memories of spending days experimenting with recording dozens of different sounds, such as hitting saucepans with wooden spoons, stamping on melons, breaking bits of wood, and some vocal stuff. Plus, I would watch through endless hours of *Tom & Jerry* cartoons and karate films trying to find clean samples with no other music or voices going on. I used a simple 4-bit sound sampler on the C64 and wrote some additional software to manipulate/compress the samples. I used a decent 16-bit sampler on the ST/Amiga versions, though."

The addition of two extra fists and feet turned a gentlemanly contest into an onslaught of martial pandemonium. Such was the immediacy of the mayhem that a revised scoring system was introduced to ensure the majority of game time wouldn't

THE SIMPLE ADDITION OF TWO EXTRA FISTS AND FEET TURNED A GENTLEMANLY CONTEST INTO AN ABRUPT ONSLAUGHT OF MARTIAL PANDEMONIUM



be spent bowing and restarting the match, maintaining the dynamism of a frantic rumble without losing any vital momentum.

"The so-called game 'AI' (which didn't have a label in those days) proved to be ingeniously simple in the end, and was based on varying random decisions by the computer to attack, defend, walk or do nothing and I simply narrowed down the time intervals between decisions, and the degree of randomness or accurate decisions, all varying as the difficulty level increased. A computer fighter decision on what to do was based on how far away the attacking player was from the opponent and some element of the time elapsed since the last move. If the computer player was attacking, the code could work out the exact distance between two players' hit points and target points, then use a look-up table to work out exactly what move could floor the opponent or not, and the code then increasingly chooses to do a precise attack rather than a random thump into the air knowing it's going to miss. There was plenty of other stuff, like if the players were miles apart you would choose moves that would make them walk or leap closer together."

THE LEGEND CONTINUES?

IK+ spread through the entire home computing range, graced with equally faithful conversions across the board – something its predecessor couldn't boast. The *IK* games were also suited to the console scene and the sequel was ported to the struggling Amiga CD32 in 1994 in hope of improving the flat sales. After its success on the Amiga, it was a practical move that worked as well as any version but was ultimately doomed to a quick burial along with the star-crossed console.

The Game Boy Color saw the only update of the original *International Karate*, albeit without any input from Archer MacLean. Making use of the extra buttons and improved graphical capability, this was a fun game that played well on the greatly underrated GBC. In comparison, however, the slight spoof on the original game cost it a good deal of credibility.

More of a sequel to the Game Boy Color than the original 8-bit title, the GBA saw an adaptation of *IK+*, again sporting the same cheese ball caricatures of B-movie kung fu films. The stumpy characters and the lean toward a button-mashing control system did nothing to help retain the dynamism of its reputable grandfather, however.

After 15 years, different versions and dubious updates, MacLean has confirmed rumours floating around the internet about a much fabled *International Karate Deluxe*.

"I started work on this for the ST/Amiga and have a couple of images somewhere of what it was going to look like, including the move selection/assignment sequences. But I don't want to say too much, as I'd still like to develop this with a publisher and team. So if you're a publisher and you're interested, get in touch!"



» The *International Karate* bonus round required tested the old grey matter

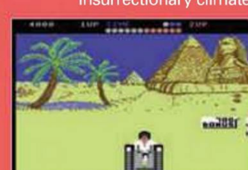
BRICKS, BOMBS AND BALLS

No fighting game is complete without between-bout-bonus-rounds and *International Karate* employed an original method of amassing points.

Standing firm and resolute, the player must wait for the sensei's command before smashing a stack of bricks with the hardest part of their anatomy. Well, actually, their head.

The sequel employed two different methods of breaking up the gameplay. The first involved deflecting bouncing balls with a small shield, though your off-screen training partners would occasionally see fit to hurl a severed head for you to deflect (presumably belonging to one of the bested opponents from your previous match).

Between more advanced rounds of *IK+*, bombs were tossed about the screen for the player to either kick away, avoid, or throw themselves upon selflessly. A stupendously fun bout that was always over far too quickly and remains particularly poignant during today's turbulent, insurrectionary climate.



UNQUESTIONABLY THE BEST OF THE CLASSIC CASTLEVANIA GAMES

AKUMAJO DRACULA X: CHI NO RONDO

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** TURBO DUO
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £95+
- » **CAN'T IMPORT? THEN WHY NOT TRY:** CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

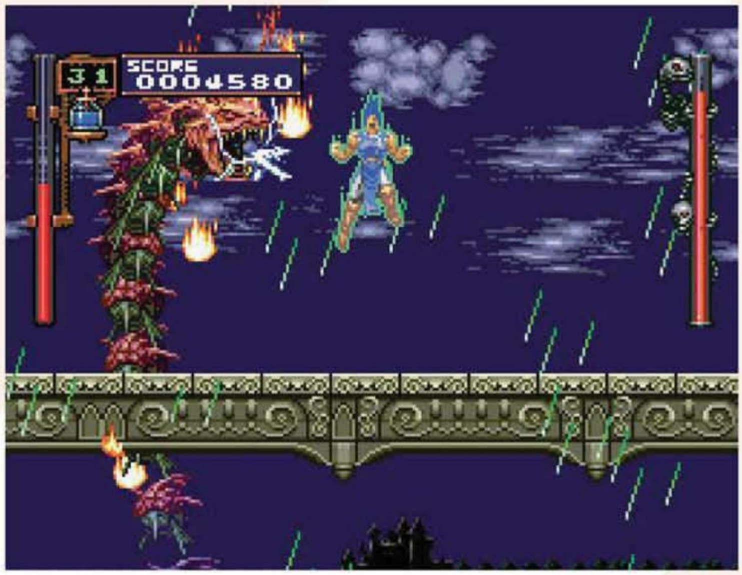
SOTN was the first game to radically alter the formula, making the series more like *Super Metroid*. It also features nearly all the enemies from *Dracula X*, the storyline directly carries on (it actually starts with the final boss fight from *Dracula X*), and it gives the ability to play as Richter. So while gameplay isn't strictly the same, *SOTN* is the next best thing. It's actually better in some ways, so why not get both?





Interesting fact
There was a half-arsed attempt to port *Dracula X* to the SNES (sort of), released in Europe as *Vampire's Kiss*. Unfortunately it's regarded as one of the worst *Castlevania* games and, despite some superficial similarities, is nothing like the Turbo Duo *Dracula X*.

One of the few Castlevanias that never made it the West and also one of the best.

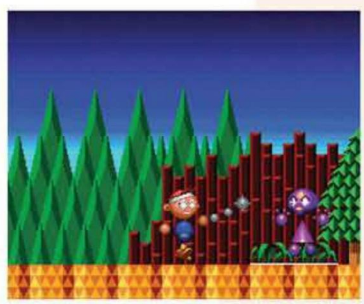


» Unleashing a storm of holy water against an evil demon – one of so many amazing set-piece battles

メガ駆動機構

Very few *Castlevania* titles remained exclusive to Japan. There was the Sharp X86000 game (which made it to the UK anyway, via the PSone port), some strange Famicom spin-offs (*Kid Dracula*, though the GB version came over here), the Saturn version of *Symphony Of The Night*, and then there was *Akumajo Dracula X: Chi No Rondo* (hereafter called *Rondo*) in 1993. The vast majority of the series was, thankfully, brought to the West. So it's ironic that the greatest of them all, at least regarding the classic series before *Symphony Of The Night*, was the one that never made it. Quite why it stayed in Japan has never been fully explained, though it's likely because the American Turbo Duo (which never made it to the UK) was dying out. The disappointment of fans is readily apparent – you only need to look at the import prices, which hover at around £80 on a slow day at eBay and rocket to over £100 from dealers or if collectors get into a bidding frenzy. People are determined to import and play it, which is understandable since it's both excellent and exclusive.

Everything about *Rondo* is exquisite, with a level of refinement which shows how much logical thinking went into the game. Being



» The seldom seen Stage X, a nice, albeit superfluous, addition to *Dracula X*.



» This woman in red kisses Richter and steals hearts, while a naked succubus rides a flying skull. Kinky stuff



» Anime cinemas, lots of anime cinemas. Why haven't other *Castlevania* games featured such anime cut-scenes?

the first in the series to be on CD, Konami included anime cinemas and full voice acting – *Rondo* would become the only game in the series to have this, since while later titles (like *SOTN*) had voice acting, they never had the same regular mid-game cinemas.

Overall presentation was faultless. With the game being set in Eastern Europe Konami made the ingenious decision to have the intro narrated in German (with Japanese subtitles), giving proceedings a gothic atmosphere. The menu screens contain operatic music and classical nude statues. Even trying to play the game without the needed System Card yields rewards. Normally a PC-Engine CD-ROM game will simply display a splash screen asking for the correct card to be used but Konami went that extra mile and provided a short mini-level called "Stage X" to play through – featuring cute characters. It's short and offers nothing beyond a curious talking point but the mere existence of such superfluous additions makes the game a joy to behold. More companies need to show this level of craftsmanship with their games.

Despite the limitations of the ageing NEC hardware, especially compared to the SNES, the visuals in *Rondo* were bright and striking – better than those in *Super Castlevania IV*, which was on superior hardware. The key thing to notice is not only the change of artistic style but also the fantastic art direction. The power of a console is unimportant if there isn't the artistic skill to make use of it; Konami managed to do more with *Rondo*'s limitations than other companies manage with thrice the power. Colours are balanced and stand out, giving personality to the painstakingly well-animated creatures. The designs of the enemies are also worth noting, being of such high quality they were later re-used to become synonymous with the series.

Then there's the music. Has Konami ever done a bad *Castlevania* soundtrack? Unlikely, but unquestionably it has seldom created music better than that in *Rondo*. A fusion of classical symphonies and electric guitar, remixes of past classic tunes and, thanks to the CD-medium it's all of the highest quality red book audio – a far more intense experience than the more orchestral (though excellent) medleys of *SOTN*. It's worth loading the game just to listen to the music.



» Amazingly, Konami has just announced a PSP remake that will feature both the original game and *Symphony of the Night*

The gameplay meanwhile offered a refinement of past titles, becoming the pinnacle of the series. It introduced the ability to backflip by pressing jump twice and also allowed you to re-acquire recently dropped items. This was brilliant, as even if you accidentally collected something it didn't mean the loss of vital weaponry. The biggest addition, though, was being allowed to jump off and directly onto staircases – the previous rules of stair navigation proved so frustrating, Konami's *Snatcher* included a sly joke stating older games caused the teenage suicide rate of Japan to increase. *Rondo* also brought back several features missing from post-*Castlevania 3* titles. While it wasn't the first game in the series to include different playable characters or branching pathways, it brought back these additions with style. Rescuing Maria made her a playable character, complete with a new set of power-ups, homing doves as weapons, and an incredibly useful double-jump. The need to search every area, to discover hidden passages leading to secret levels, also added a great sense of achievement and exploration. Stumbling across a new screen-filling boss was a thrilling experience and, after a few levels, there was no doubt about the perfection of *Akumajo Dracula X: Chi No Rondo*.

The above may seem like emotional gushing, but we only do it to nullify our disappointment at *Rondo* having never reached the audience it deserves. Konami only ported the X68000 game, released as *Castlevania Chronicles*, when they should have brought us *Rondo*. While countless trash polluted British store shelves, we were missing classics like this. It has a high price, but one that is easily justified.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



Now in its 17th year, Team 17 is one of Britain's few surviving game is fondly remembered for its technical achievements speak to Ashley Day about the early days of the Amiga's





» *X2* was the PlayStation-only sequel to *Project X* and it was top class

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

TEAM 17

Team 17 started life on 5 December 1990 when Martyn Brown of 17 Bit Software, a successful shareware distributor, decided that he and a few like-minded Amiga enthusiasts could offer exciting, new games that took full advantage of the machine they loved so dearly. "As Amiga nuts and games nuts we were a little sick of the crappy ST ports that were coming out for the Amiga and wanted to do classic games that made the most of the hardware and delivered the spirit we felt was lacking," explains Brown. "It was just one of those decisions when we decided to go for it and the team from 17 Bit became Team 17."

Martyn Brown and fellow 17 Bit member Rico Holmes set about assembling a super-developer made up of the most talented and passionate members from the Amiga demo scene. It became clear from the outset that each member's love for the Amiga platform would feed into their games. "The Amiga was always very special to us and we had a brilliant time developing games for it," recalls Brown. "It wasn't a job as such, it was just enthusiasm carrying us along in those days." Due to the widespread popularity of Commodore's computer across mainland Europe, many of the Team resided on the continent and chose to work at a distance from the Yorkshire HQ. Brown didn't see it as a problem: "To be honest, it was easier that way. Essentially what we had were a number of satellite studios, even if they were based in bedrooms/homes around the UK and substantially, Sweden. It just meant I spent a bit of time on the road, it never felt like a problem, even if it was before email/internet was widely used. We had 14.4K and (later 56K) modems – which were the dogs at the time."

With the fresh-faced and enthusiastic team in place it was soon time to begin work on their first professional title. *Full Contact*, a realistically styled one-on-one fighter, was released in the spring of 1991 and went straight to the top spot of the Amiga charts despite mass distribution of a pirate copy that erroneously credited the developer as 'Team 7'. At the budget price of £9.99 the game was an attractive purchase and very lucrative for Team 17, who decided to self-publish and not lose out on any sales revenue. The strategy proved very useful for the team, as it was better able to finance future projects and, without a clueless publisher breathing down its neck, was free to create whatever it liked.

That creative freedom would pay off in a big way with Team 17's next and arguably best game: *Alien Breed*. *Amiga Power* described *Breed* as: "A very sophisticated game exploiting the ability of the Amiga to its fullest in both looks and gameplay". The review was typical of the general reaction to *Alien Breed*, the public went mad for Team 17's addictive blaster and bought enough copies to keep *Alien Breed: Special Edition* at the top of the Amiga's budget chart for over 33 weeks.

Following *Alien Breed* was a string of Team 17 hits, most notably the *Strider*-esque platform game *Assassin* and the *Gradius*-inspired *Project X*. In two short years, Team 17 had grown from a miniscule shareware distributor into one of Britain's biggest software talents. With each new game showcasing arcade quality graphics and gameplay it was amazing that the team had managed to remain exclusive to the Amiga. Brown had considered other platforms but

IN BRIEF

Starting life as a humble distributor of shareware and demos, Team 17 became one of the most prolific Amiga developers and publishers of the early Nineties. Early titles like *Alien Breed* and *Superfrog* brought Team 17 fame until its breakthrough hit, *Worms*, brought it fortune. Team 17's early years as a self-funded developer paved the way for the independence it enjoys today and its status as a celebrity publisher in the Amiga days had talented artists and coders queuing up to make games for the teamsters.

independent developers. From Alien Breed to Worms, each and addictive gameplay. Martyn Brown and Marcus Dyson most cherished developer



Full Contact was Team 17's very first game. It's pretty isn't it?

Team 17 would not go multiformat for several years. "We almost went Mega Drive at one point in '92, to the extent that we almost left the Amiga altogether, such were the offers. However, we enjoyed our publishing position too much."

With Team 17 now well established as a successful Amiga publisher, it begun to publish the games of other developers. *Assassin*, developed by Psionic Systems, was the first of many, yet, unlike other publisher/developer relationships, Team 17 worked much closer with the developers. Staff from Team 17 would often assist the developer or the team would permanently recruit some developers into the main group. Allister Brimble composed the music for *Assassin*, for example, no doubt due to his relationship with Team 17 after writing the soundtrack to *Alien Breed*. With fresh talent from the Amiga scene coming and going through Team 17's doors, the publisher felt like a club that everyone could be a part of. Legendary Amiga animator Eric Schwartz created a brilliant intro-sequence for *Superfrog* and freelance programmer Jamie Woodhouse was temporarily brought into the fold to make *ATR* and *Qwak*: a particular favourite among Team 17's staff.

By 1993, Team 17 had hit its stride and released a staggering ten games and five compilations in the space of 12 months. It wasn't a case of quantity over quality though, as those releases included memorable games like *Alien Breed II*, *Superfrog* and *Body Blows*. In recognition of its swift growth and large output in 1993, Team 17 won a Publisher of the Year award, which it shared with the monolithic Electronic Arts. Just one of the achievements that Martyn Brown is proud of: "There are many, First Game, First Number One, the original *Alien Breed*, *Superfrog* and *Body Blows*... The feeling that *Arcade Pool* got". Things couldn't have been more promising for the rapidly maturing developer but the events of the following months were to cast a shadow over the Amiga scene that would threaten the continued production of Team 17's Amiga games.

Following the failure of Commodore's consolised Amiga 1200, the CD32, the giant computing firm was in serious trouble. Sales were falling, piracy was high and too much profit had been invested in new models of Amiga that nobody wanted. In April 1994, Commodore filed for bankruptcy and production of all Amiga hardware came to an abrupt halt. The Amiga's future looked bleak but, remarkably, new games kept coming. The A1200 was a little over a year old with vast quantities of untapped potential, its position as a powerful home computer also meant that it had a large user base that was still willing to buy new software. Team 17 decided to stick with the Amiga for the time being and it was in this period that its best ever games were made.

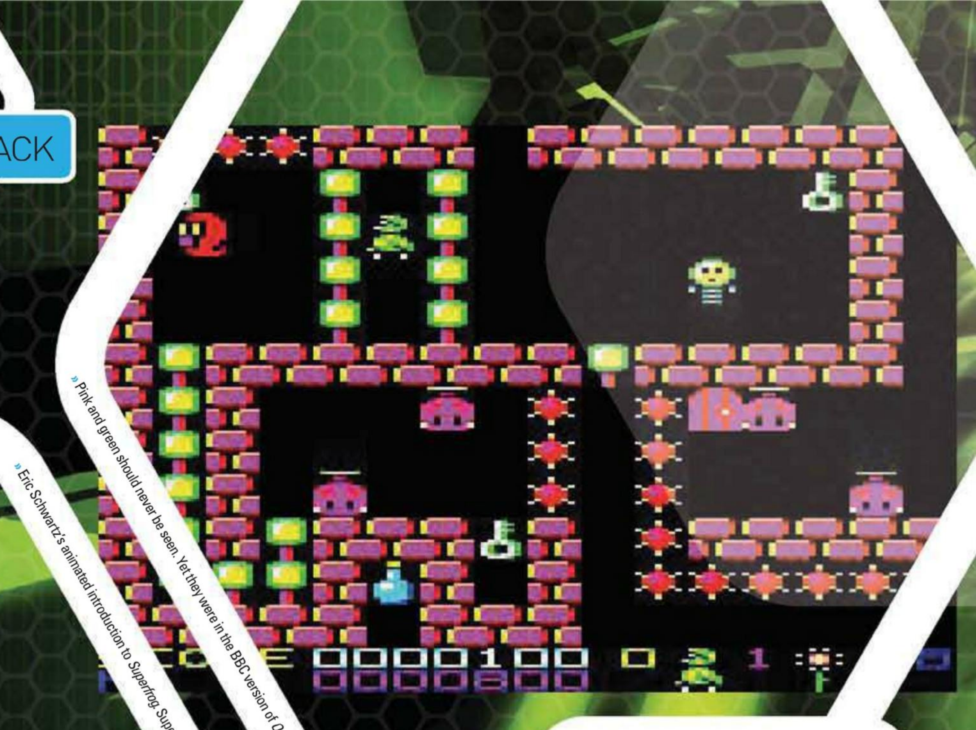
Seeing that the Amiga market was about to go through serious upheaval after the fall of Commodore, Marcus Dyson, the editor of Amiga Format decided that a change in career was needed and left the world of publishing to join the ranks of Team 17. "It was apparent that the Amiga was in decline," says Dyson. "I thought, and in the end it turned out not to be true, that Team 17 would continue to be involved with the Amiga for longer than Future Publishing did." Moving back to his Wakefield home was the icing on the cake. "It was easy to move back here and it enabled me to hang out with my old friends and it was also a pleasure to see a publisher out of Wakefield doing well."

THE BIG 17

With Team 17 now in its 17th year of independent development, we asked Martyn Brown if he ever imagined that it would last so long. "Absolutely not," he replied, "it's very difficult to plan long term in the games industry. We were very young and very naive back then and it's incredible to find that we're now in our 17th year, world-renowned and vastly more experienced and worldly wise, some 40 plus projects and 150 or so skus, not to mention about 12 to 14 million game sales, on. I'm not sure how we're going to celebrate year 17, but I can lend a few guesses..." How about an anthology of Team 17's Amiga hits for modern consoles? "Not right now, but who knows? The back catalogue has been licensed for a number of things and people will see them. Above all, I'm delighted there's still interest in our work and hopefully we'll get a chance to revisit them in the future again. I'd like to thank everyone who played and enjoyed our games and gave us great feedback."



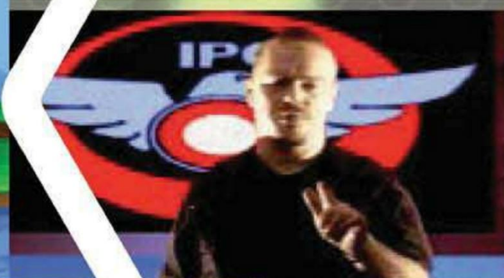




» Pink and green should never be seen. Yet they were in the BBC version of *Qwak*



» Eric Schwartz's animated introduction to *Superfrog*. Superb stuff…



» Marcus Dyson stars in the grainy FMV intro to *Alien Breed Tower Assault*



CANNED GOODS

Every developer has a few unfinished works locked away in the vault and Team 17 is, as you would expect, no exception. Some, like the new *Alien Breed* and *Superfrog* games, never made it past the concept stage while others were shown off in magazines and adverts only to mysteriously disappear. *Final Over Cricket*, a *Sensible Soccer*-style cricket game, was canned in 1994 when the coder unexpectedly decided to stop working on the game. As one of Team 17's satellite developers, they could do nothing about his disappearance and had to forget about the promising title.

King Of Thieves was intended to be a medieval spin on the *Alien Breed* games but was cancelled in 1996, as was *Pussies Galore*, a cheekily titled platform game. "*Pussies* and *King Of Thieves* were canned because we didn't feel they were going to be great games," says Brown. We imagine they're no great loss then, although *Final Over Cricket* does look like it'd have been brilliant fun.

Dyson began his career at Team 17 as project manager on *Alien Breed Tower Assault* and was immediately thrown into the team's rather unique method of game development. "It was part of the company's culture that everybody was involved in everything and because I had a background in graphic design I'd help out with map and packaging design whenever there was an opportunity." Dyson also appeared in the infamous FMV introduction to the CD32 version of *Alien Breed Tower Assault*, and the low-budget space opera was, in fact, just as embarrassing to watch then as it is today. "Someone said it was like the cast of *Emmerdale* doing *Star Wars*, which I think is racist," laments Dyson. "You know, we're Northerners but we're proud of the fact."

Dyson's contributions to Team 17's projects became much more instrumental to the developer when its most successful game hit a stumbling block before it had even been released. During Dyson's time as editor of *Amiga Format*, the magazine ran a competition where readers had to create a game in Blitz Basic. Andy Davidson, an artist and Amiga nut from Bournemouth, submitted *Total Wormage*: the demo that eventually became *Worms*. Ironically enough, the game slipped through the judges' net and went completely unnoticed. It wasn't until the following ECTS that Davidson had the chance to personally force them to play his game and Team 17 realised the game had to be published. Just 14 months later the reprogrammed and retitled *Worms* was ready to take over the world but one thing stood in their way. When Davidson told Team 17 that he had originally submitted the game to *Amiga Format*'s competition, Dyson quickly realised, with horror, that every demo submitted to the magazine automatically became the property of Future Publishing. Cunningly, Dyson managed to get *Amiga Format* to transfer all the rights to *Total Wormage* before anyone knew how much of a success *Worms* would be. "Since I had only recently left Future, I called Greg Ingham and asked him if he had any objection to us using the game. He said no and the day was saved." It was a move that proved great for Team 17 and, in hindsight, not so good for Future…

After achieving worldwide acclaim for the Amiga version of *Worms* in 1995, Team 17 wisely decided that now was the time to go multiformat. Unfortunately, not everyone agreed. Dyson tells us: "Sony didn't want to take *Worms* at all". Every other platform signed up to *Worms*. They came along, looked at the game and said 'That's great'. 3DO were literally beating the door down to get *Worms*, but Sony said 'No. The policy is 3D games only". Hence you got *3D Lemmings*, the game that effectively killed off the franchise." Fast-forward to 2005 and Team 17 ironically found itself developing a 2D version of *Lemmings* for Sony's PSP.

Needless to say, Sony wasn't stupid enough to turn down a game that had sold in excess of 5 million copies and soon relented on its policy. The rest is history: Team 17 went from being heroes of the Amiga scene to world-renowned videogame developers almost overnight. A successful PC and console career was calling but Team 17 wasn't done with the Amiga yet. "There was a distinct feeling in the company that we ought to give a showcase to the people that had upgraded their Amigas," recalls Dyson. With that in mind, Team



The PlayStation 2 Alien Breed that was canned last year

» Marcus Dyson. Ex-project manager for Team 17

17 produced *Alien Breed 3D II: The Killing Grounds* and, although its gameplay suffered significantly, the graphics were absolutely stunning: a triumph of coding for any Amiga developer. As a tribute to the game-starved Amiga fans it was a welcome gift that was bettered only by Team 17's next and final Amiga release. 1997 brought *Worms: The Director's Cut*, an Amiga exclusive sequel to *Worms* that was as much a treat for Amiga owners as it was for creator Andy Davidson. Dyson tells us: "*Director's Cut* was really more about Andy being given a free rein to do whatever was in his slightly strange brain". *Worms: DC* was a critical success but only sold 4,000 copies at retail. Due to the Amiga's diminishing popularity, Martyn Brown decided to end Amiga production for good and concentrate on the expanding console and PC sector. "We had grown up with the Amiga but we weren't all enthusiastic teenagers anymore, we'd got wives, kids and mortgages – we couldn't just do stuff for the love of it".

Since then, a number of *Worms* sequels have followed but the move to 3D has failed to recreate the magic of the original game. The sun has set on Team 17's classic period but a new age is dawning. New 2D versions of *Worms* are now available (along with an excellent Live Arcade update) and Team 17 has returned to its roots with a remake of the Amiga classic *Lemmings*. Martyn Brown is optimistic about the future. "We've poured a lot of tender TLC into *Lemmings* and we're sure it'll be a massive hit on PSP." As for their own franchises, "*Alien Breed*... Lets see, that might be worth a shout," he says with a smile.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Ever wonder what happened to Andy Davidson? After creating *Worms*, Andy worked alongside Team 17 to develop *Worms: The Directors Cut*, *Worms 2* and *Worms Armageddon* before leaving for pastures new. "I'd seen so many games I'd loved in the past devalued by sequels for the sake of sequels – I didn't want that happening here", says Davidson.

"I'd been working on ideas for a completely different game, but I wasn't given the go-ahead to develop it further so it was at that point that I decided to leave." Seemingly happy to live on royalties from *Worms* alone, Davidson returned to Bournemouth never to be heard from again… until now. After working in secret for three years, Davidson has finally revealed his new project.

Opened in his home town, Davidson's ibar is one of the country's first "digital nightclubs' and boasts several unique features such as the ability to "download exclusive audio and video content to your phone or laptop, while in the bar, for free" and the option to "hear new music created in the club in front of you from the ground-up." To find out more, log on to ibar.com.

SOFTOGRAPHY

1991

Full Contact
System: Amiga
Publisher: Team 17

Alien Breed
System: Amiga, PC
Publisher: Team 17

Alien Breed Special Edition '92
System: Amiga, CD32
Publisher: Team 17

1992

Project-X
System: Amiga, CD32, PC
Publisher: Team 17

Assassin
System: Amiga
Publisher: Team 17

1993

Alien Breed II: The Horror Continues
System: Amiga, CD32
Publisher: Team 17

Superfrog
System: Amiga, CD32, PC
Publisher: Team 17

Project-X Special Edition
System: Amiga
Publisher: Team 17

Qwak
System: Amiga, CD32
Publisher: Team 17

F17 Challenge
System: Amiga, CD32
Publisher: Team 17

Apidya
System: Amiga
Publisher: Team 17

Cardiaxx
System: Amiga
Publisher: Team 17

Overdrive
System: Amiga, PC
Publisher: Team 17

Body Blows
System: Amiga, PC
Publisher: Team 17

Silverball
System: PC
Publisher: Team 17

1994

Arcade Pool
System: Amiga, CD32, PC
Publisher: Team 17

Super Stardust
System: Amiga, CD32
Publisher: Team 17

Body Blows Galactic
System: Amiga
Publisher: Team 17

Alien Breed: Tower Assault
System: Amiga, CD32, PC
Publisher: Team 17

Assassin Special Edition
System: Amiga
Publisher: Team 17

Ultimate Body Blows
System: CD32, PC
Publisher: Team 17

1995

The Speris Legacy
System: Amiga, CD32
Publisher: Ocean

Kingpin: Arcade Sports Bowling
System: Amiga, CD32, PC
Publisher: Team 17

ATR - All Terrain Racing
System: Amiga, CD32
Publisher: Team 17

Worms
System: Amiga, CD32, PC, Mega Drive, Saturn, Jaguar, Mac, PlayStation, Game Boy, SNES
Publisher: Ocean

Alien Breed 3D
System: Amiga, CD32
Publisher: Ocean

1996

Alien Breed 3D II: The Killing Grounds
System: Amiga
Publisher: Ocean

World Rally Fever
System: PC
Publisher: Ocean

X2
System: PlayStation
Publisher: Ocean

1997

Worms: The Director's Cut
System: Amiga
Publisher: Ocean

Worms 2
System: PC
Publisher: Microprose

1998

Addiction Pinball
System: PC
Publisher: Microprose

Nightlong: Union City Conspiracy
System: PC, Amiga (Converted by ClickBOOM in 1999)
Publisher: Microprose

1999

Name: Arcade Pool II
System: PC
Publisher: Microprose

Phoenix
System: PC
Publisher: Microprose

Worms Armageddon
System: PC, PlayStation, Dreamcast, Nintendo 64, Game Boy Color
Publisher: Microprose

Worms Pinball
System: PlayStation
Publisher: Infogrames

2001

Worms World Party
System: PC, Dreamcast, PlayStation, Game Boy Advance, N-Gage, Gizmondo
Publisher: Virgin

Stunt GP
System: PC, Dreamcast, PlayStation2
Publisher: Atari

2002

Worms Blast
System: PC, Mac, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, PlayStation2
Publisher: Ubisoft

2003

Worms 3D
System: PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, Mac
Publisher: Sega

2004

Worms Forts: Under Siege
System: PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox,
Publisher: Sega

2005

Worms 4: Mayhem
System: PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox
Publisher: Codemasters

2006

Lemmings
System: PSP, PS2, PS3
Publisher: Sony

Worms: Open Warfare
System: PSP, DS
Publisher: THQ

2007

Worms
System: Xbox Live Arcade
Publisher: Team 17

Timeline

With over 40 games to their name, there are plenty of Team 17 titles to choose from. Here are all its Amiga releases from 1991 to 1999



FULL CONTACT [1991]

Systems: Amiga 500

Team 17's demo background shone through in the amazing intro sequence to this one-on-one fighting game. Gameplay left a lot to be desired, however, and paled in comparison to the superior *IK+*. The introduction, realistic graphics and brilliant soundtrack are all still great now, but this really isn't worth playing and, as Team 17's debut title, it showed little sign of the brilliance that was to come.

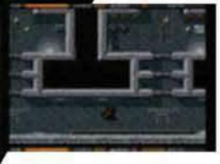


ALIEN BREED

[1991]

Systems: Amiga 500

Rico Holmes and Andreas Tadic fused *Gauntlet* with *Alien* to create one of the greatest co-operative games on the Amiga. Some prefer *Chaos Engine* for the run-'n'-gun fun but *Alien Breed's* emphasis on complicated mazes, ammo conservation and the smart use of keys made it far more playable. The atmospheric graphics and music made *Alien Breed* that much more compelling to play but, at only six levels long, the experience was a short-lived one.



ALIEN BREED SPECIAL EDITION '92

[1992]

Systems: Amiga 500, CD32

With a true sequel to *Alien Breed* still several months away, Team 17 decided to keep the fans happy by releasing this extended version of the original. Now with 12 full levels, the game was twice the size of its predecessor and all the better for it. For those dying to play the first *Breed* this is the best version to go for and much easier to find than the original these days.



PROJECT-X

[1992]

Systems: Amiga 500, CD32, PC

Team 17 was a huge fan of arcade-style games and no other title proved it more than *Project-X*. Essentially a clone of Konami's *Gradius*, *Project-X* was a horizontal shooter with selectable power-ups. It distinguished itself from the Japanese hit by allowing you to upgrade your selected weapon several times to the point where bullets and lasers filled the screen. An unmistakably European techno soundtrack rounded off an excellent shoot-'em-up.



ASSASSIN

[1992]

Systems: Amiga 500

"Although this game bears many similarities to *Strider*, it's actually a lot better" (CU Amiga Nov 92). Darran's probably spitting blood at the sight of that quote right now and he'd be right to do so. *Assassin*'s wall-hanging antics were more than a little similar to the Capcom classic and, while it was a very enjoyable Amiga game, it certainly wasn't a *Strider* beater. Think of this more as a fun homage.



ALIEN BREED II - THE HORROR CONTINUES

[1993]

Systems: Amiga 500, Amiga 1200, CD32

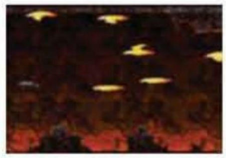
From the moment *Alien Breed II* started to its final levels, the action was a non-stop, pure adrenaline rush. Aliens could fire back, helicopters swept the planet's surface with deadly aim and levels self-destructed with dramatic timing. This was heart-pounding gameplay at its finest and yet another flawless episode in Team 17's signature blastathon. The A1200 version had better graphics but was much more difficult and prone to occasional slowdown.



SUPERFROG [1993]

Systems: Amiga 500, CD32, PC

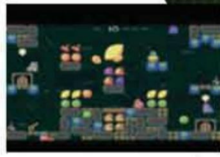
While some saw Zool and James Pond as the Amiga's best platform mascots it was the Lucozade guzzling Superfrog that stood out from the crowd. Tight controls and an excellent theme tune (from Allister Brimble again) made *Superfrog* much more fun to play. Levels were packed with secret areas and interspersed with a great little fruit machine simulator that added a distinctly British touch to the game.



PROJECT X SPECIAL EDITION [1993]

Systems: Amiga 500

Unlike *Alien Breed Special Edition* this didn't feature any extra levels at all. Instead Team 17 had listened to complaints that the original *Project X* was too hard. It was much easier to power up the craft this time around and, in comparison to the original, you lost less firepower every time you died. This was a great way to see the beautiful later levels that were too hard to reach in the original.



QWAK [1993]

Systems: Amiga 500, CD32

Originally a BBC Micro game by Jamie Woodhouse, this 16-bit upgrade was a highly addictive single-screen platformer in the same vein as Taito's *Bubble Bobble*. This is definitely one of the most colourful games to appear on the Amiga and also one of the most playable. It's a shame that this charmingly old-school platformer never really got the attention it deserved. Still, a GBA version is now available directly from Jamie.



F17 CHALLENGE [1993]

Systems: Amiga 500, CD32

Looking much more like something Sega would make than the typical Amiga developer, *F17 Challenge* was initially eye-catching and very arcade-like. The game was fast and fun with yet another great soundtrack but lacked the depth to keep players entertained for more than a couple of evenings. But at a price of £12.99 who really had the right to complain about longevity? Not us.



APIDYA [1993]

Systems: Amiga 500

Team 17 had nothing to do with the development of this side-scrolling shooter as it had already been published by someone else a year or so before. Despite that, *Apidya* fit into the Team 17 catalogue very comfortably as it played similarly to *Project X* with the exception that you took control of a wasp and had to blast through other insects in the garden. Think *Gradius* crossed with *Buck Bumble* and you'd be spot on.



CARDIAXX [1993]

Systems: Amiga 500

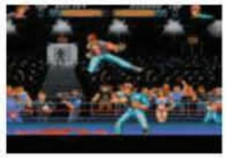
Yet another shoot-'em-up from Team 17. The usual Team 17 guys didn't develop *Cardiaxx*, as it was a budget re-release of an Eclipse Design game and lacked the flair of the developer's internal projects. *Cardiaxx* played like a cut-down version of *Defender* and was remarkable only for the inexplicable way it displayed the score right in the middle of the screen.



OVERDRIVE [1993]

Systems: Amiga 500, PC

A racing game that was an awful lot like *Micro Machines* with the exception that it was about as enjoyable as eating a pair of dirty underpants. The biggest problem was that it ran so quickly that it was impossible to take a corner properly unless you knew it was coming. This effectively made *Overdrive* a memory test that, once each track was committed to the grey matter, actually required no skill whatsoever.



BODY BLOWS [1993]

Systems: Amiga 500, PC

The original *Body Blows* was hailed as a *Street Fighter* beater by the specialist press back in 1993. Going back to the game now though, we have to wonder just what they were thinking. The loading times are unbearably slow and the animation rather turgid. Worst of all, with only one fire button, the attacks feel limited and cumbersome. The only *Street Fighter* this was better than was the C64 version.

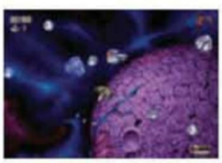
1991 | 1992 | 1993



ARCADE POOL [1994]

Systems: Amiga 500, CD32, PC

While games like *Jimmy White's Cueball* had much better graphics there was still little to complain about when it came to *Arcade Pool*. Presentation may have been a little basic but the physics were spot on and the use of just two mouse buttons to play kept things just the right side of simple. *Arcade Pool* is notable for its realistic crowd noises that, if you listened carefully, contained actual snippets of conversation.



SUPER STARDUST [1994]

Systems: Amiga 1200, CD32

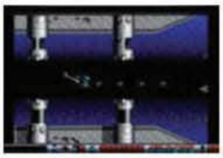
A pretty cool *Asteroids* clone from Bloodhouse software. *Super Stardust* is most notable for its stunning graphics that made full use of the AGA chipset. From the eye-melting range of colours to the metallic sheen on the spacecraft, everything looked superb. The 3D bonus levels – think *Microcosm* but better – were an excellent showcase for the A1200's abilities.



BODY BLOWS GALACTIC [1994]

Systems: Amiga 500

Body Blows Galactic, like its predecessor, looked great and begged to be liked. Great graphics do not make a great game though and, aside from the science fiction theme, there was little to differentiate this from the lacklustre original. Check out *Shadow Fighter* or *Fightin' Spirit* if you're after an Amiga brawler that actually plays as well as it looks.



APACHE [1994]

Systems: Amiga 500

Apache was a horizontal shooter in which you had to pilot a helicopter, rescue civilians and carry them back to base. The game was created by the same coder and artist who made *Assassin* and was given away free with *Body Blows Galactic*. Although it's always good to get something for free, *Apache*'s short levels and sloppy controls made it quite a poor gift.



ALIEN BREED TOWER ASSAULT [1994]

Systems: Amiga 1200, CD32, PC

Tower Assault was the final 2D *Alien Breed* and, next to *Worms*, is Team 17's most replayable game. The A1200's abilities were used to the fullest to make a beautifully realised, fast-paced shooter. The new ability to walk backwards while firing complemented the action movie feel and the non-linear levels ensured that there was always something new to see. Avoid the PC version if possible, as there are loads of levels missing.



ASSASSIN SPECIAL EDITION [1994]

Systems: Amiga 500

You've got to love Team 17, just for never giving up. *Assassin Special Edition* had tighter gameplay than the original and was a full £15 cheaper. The main difference was that the default weapon had been changed from a boomerang to a gun. This made the pace of the game much quicker and the difficulty a little fairer. *Assassin* was now a fairly enjoyable game... but it still wasn't better than *Strider*.



ULTIMATE BODY BLOWS [1994]

Systems: CD32, PC

Team 17 tried, for the third and final time, to get the *Body Blows* formula right with this special CD32 edition. The roster combined combatants from *Body Blows* and *Body Blows Galactic* while the controls were spread over the joypad's four face buttons. The same old problems reared their ugly heads, though; combat was still awkwardly stilted and unbalanced while the move to CD did nothing to speed up the loading times.

1 9 9 4



THE SPERIS LEGACY [1995]

Systems: Amiga 1200, CD32

Team 17's habit of cloning popular Japanese titles really didn't pay off this time: nobody can out-*Zelda* Nintendo and only a fool would try. Graphically this looked very similar to *Link To The Past* but lacked much of the charm of the classic SNES game. *The Speris Legacy* ultimately failed because it couldn't replicate the expertly formed structure of *Zelda's* exploration/combat/item-collection cocktail.



ARCADE SNOOKER [1995]

Systems: Amiga 500

Back when cover-mounted discs were something special, Team 17 knocked *Arcade Snooker* together to be given away free with the July '95 issue of *CU Amiga*. This was nothing more than a reworked version of *Arcade Pool* but it was a full game nonetheless. It played well and, as a freebie, was a great example of the developer's love for the Amiga community.



ATR - ALL TERRAIN RACING [1995]

Systems: Amiga 500, CD32

Jamie Woodhouse's other Team 17 game is probably the best racer to come from the developer. The graphics and sound were exemplary as always and the gameplay was very addictive. The likes of *Super Skidmarks* were better racing games but this was still worthy of a few laps nonetheless.



WORMS [1995]

Systems: Amiga 500, CD32, PC, Mega Drive, Saturn, Jaguar, Mac, PlayStation, Game Boy, SNES

The game that put Team 17 on the map! Andy Davidson's *Total Wormage* went from Blitz Basic demo to multiformat success overnight, largely because of Davidson's quirky British humour but also because of the hard work that went into creating a game engine that stood up to countless hours of multiplayer mayhem. The Amiga version remains the best to this day thanks to the ability to create new levels in Deluxe Paint.



ALIEN BREED 3D [1995]

Systems: Amiga 1200, CD32

id Software didn't believe it could be done, but Andy Clitheroe somehow managed to get a highly playable and atmospheric *Doom* clone running on the humble A1200. Granted, the move to 3D resulted in *Alien Breed* losing a lot of the original's unique charm but it was still fantastic to play. This was the moment that the Amiga stood up to the bullying of the PC and proved its worth as a powerful home computer.

1 9 9 5



ALIEN BREED 3D II: THE KILLING GROUNDS [1996]

Systems: Amiga 1200

Ambition can be a terrible thing. Having mastered the *Doom* clone with *Alien Breed 3D*, Team 17 wanted to make an FPS to rival *Quake*. It got the engine running but, even on expanded machines, the Amiga coughed and spluttered under the strain. Poor AI and a steep difficulty curve ganged up with a sluggish frame-rate to punish anyone who dared to play. Most struggled, or couldn't be bothered, to play past level one.



WORMS: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT [1997]

Systems: Amiga 1200

The Team's last true Amiga game was a farewell gift to the community that had supported it for the past seven years and is widely regarded as the definitive *Worms* game. Andy Davidson was given free rein to go to town on the title and created many great new weapons like the Old Woman, Mad Cow and Sheep On A Rope. To quote another Amiga classic: "War has never been so much fun".



NIGHTLONG – UNION CITY CONSPIRACY [1999]

Systems: PC, Amiga CD

Although Team 17 had officially abandoned the Amiga in 1997, there were still several other developers and publishers producing Amiga games well into the new millennium. Canadian publisher ClickBOOM was one such entity and released many of the Amiga's last games of the Nineties, including this Team 17-developed graphic adventure. Owing much to *Blade Runner*, *Nightlong* was a half-decent adventure that went down well with those who refused to let the Amiga die.

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PILOTWINGS 64

Birdmen, cheesy porno music, rocket belts, giants made of metal, and apparently a texture of the Turin shroud hidden in a cave. Paradigm Entertainment managed to do a lot in time for the N64's launch. John Szczepaniak returns to the skies to explain why he preferred Pilotwings 64 over Mario 64



» Nothing like a nice bit of skydiving – just try not to get killed. The range of tasks in this game is incredibly diverse



» Stay focused and aim to get gold medals on every level – then for the ultimate test, attain perfect scores

IN THE KNOW



- » **VERSION FEATURED:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT
- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **GENRE:** SURREAL FLIGHT-SIM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

The N64 launched with only two games – *Mario 64* and *Pilotwings* (plus a third, *Saikyou Haniu Shogi,* if you insist on being pedantic). It was of course Mario which captivated and encouraged people to buy the system; he was Nintendo's all-jumping non-shaving star. Shamefully it overshadowed this equally excellent "flight-sim" from Paradigm Entertainment. Admittedly when receiving my N64 soon after launch, with both games, it was *Mario 64* which I both played first and more intensely. But it was *Pilotwings 64* that I continued to play even after attaining perfect scores of 100 on each every level; I continued to play years later, long after the N64's death – thanks to its open-ended nature, ability to create personalised goals, and above all, because no other aerial game has ever tried to match it in terms of surreal styling and blithe pacing. To put it simply, a decade later and on reflection, I think *Pilotwings 64* was the better launch title.

The N64 iteration has little to do with its SNES predecessor, which was far more serious in tone. Instead of being developed in-house, Nintendo farmed it out to Texas-based Paradigm Entertainment. The outsourcing of key games can be worrying, due to the possibility of the chosen company underperforming, but in this case, Paradigm deserves to stand tall and proud for the amazing job it did.

There are three main vehicles to control (Hang Glider, Rocket Belt, and Gyrocopter), set over four different classes: Beginner, A, B and Pilot class – each corresponding to one of four locations. The first is Holiday Island, which is quite small, featuring a scenic castle and fairground. Then there's Crescent Island (tropical rainforest, caves, whales and a large waterfall) along with Ever-Frost Island (a mostly barren place of icy mountains and an oil refinery). The highlight, though, and where most enjoyment comes from, is Little States – a detailed recreation of America (sans Alaska and Hawaii), complete with cities and prominent landmarks such as Mount Rushmore (including Mario's head). This makes for 12 main "stages", each consisting of up to three tasks that are scored out of 100; each stage has target scores for Bronze, Silver and Gold medals.

Each task, once completed, can be replayed at leisure, increasing the points and getting closer to those medals. This makes it perfect to dip in and out of. While it's easy (maybe dangerously too easy when you've got live ducks basting in the oven on a tight time limit) to spend hours and hours simply relaxing in the skies, you can also nip in and notch your score up slightly on any given level. It proves to be perfectly balanced, with an open-ended structure that adapts itself to each person's playing style. With such ingenious implementation, which is so perfect and, more importantly, so very fair it's amazing other games don't copy it; there is tremendous satisfaction from practising and then finally achieving a perfect score. Meanwhile, getting a silver medal in each class will unlock a series of bonus levels: Cannon, where you're fired at distant targets; Skydiving, which includes points for maintaining formation; Jumble Hoppers, which involves bouncy shoes; and finally the Birdman suit, which has no set goal and is simply there to casually enjoy the sights. The biggest attraction beyond the standard tasks



» Aim for the barn door, squeeze through, and then fly out the other side, all without crashing



» *Pilotwings* is full of so many nice little touches, like this launching space shuttle. Go on, race it. We dare you

COOL STUFF

There's so many cool things in *Pilotwings 64* that we weren't able to mention; to hell with a proper boxout, we're going to ramble about some of the available goodies. You can take photos in the Hang Glider and then save them to an album, preserving your great moments forever (at least until the battery dies). You can pretend to be the Gyro-Captain from *Mad Max 2* and do crazy stunts, before stopping by a "gas station" to refuel. How about flying into Nessie? Trying to land on moving ships? Or shooting whales while screaming loudly at the TV "Who is Kaiser Soze?!" Or trying to crash the Gyrocopter into innocent gliders? Or shooting Mario's Mt Rushmore face and turning it into Wario? Then of course there's the rumoured Turin shroud texture on Ever-Frost island. And all the birdman stars! Like a mail-order bride, this game just keeps giving and giving.



THE BIGGEST ATTRACTION BEYOND STANDARD TASKS IS THE OPEN-ENDED NATURE AND FACT YOU AREN'T PENALISED FOR IGNORING THE GIVEN MISSION TO GO OFF TO DO YOUR OWN THING



» The visuals aren't as amazing as they were a decade ago but they're perfectly functional and on occasion quite nice



» After shooting Mario's face on Mount Rushmore it turns into Wario, as seen here



» Meca Hawk, technically the only baddie in the game, requires several swift rockets to be destroyed. Make him dance!

(which involve flying through rings, taking photos and shooting things), and also the reason why I still play it years later, is the open-ended nature of the gameplay and the fact you aren't penalised for ignoring the given mission to go off to do your own thing. Bored of the rings? Then why not try barnstorming, driving on the road, landing on the dam, flying under an oil rig? The Little States area has countless things to distract you, while the game-engine encourages experimentation. Simply make up your own goal and go for it! Or add beer and friends to the mix for a great party game.

Everything is designed to encourage the player and be innately fun, a stark contrast to other overly complex flight-sims which have you wrestling with dials and controls rather than enjoying the actual flying. The 3D engine and physics – while not as astonishingly impressive anymore – are neat, functional and, despite their comparative simplicity today, don't detract from the overall experience. More importantly is that when coupled with the sublime analogue joystick, the controls are as smooth as Johnson's Baby Oil on warm Teflon. And let's not forget the music: high-twanging and super-cheesy guitar licks that sound like they come straight from a cheap porno, coupled with some laid-back and very soothing music in the hang glider levels. After a gruelling day's work (such as being a games journalist – Ed), the surreal and chilled-out atmosphere, along with the music, is a wonderful way to unwind.

Thinking about it, if we were to forsake the faux-intellectuality of magazines that state few if any games are actually flawless, and that all games in some way must have negatives, we'd have to say *Pilotwings 64* is actually a perfect game. There is honestly nothing to fault, in the perspective of its era. All that's really needed is a visually updated sequel for the Wii or even the original with some improved textures on the Virtual Console. Make it happen Nintendo, and watch as the nation never goes to work again.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BEETLE ADVENTURE RACING
SYSTEMS: N64
YEAR: 1999

SPY HUNTER
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2002

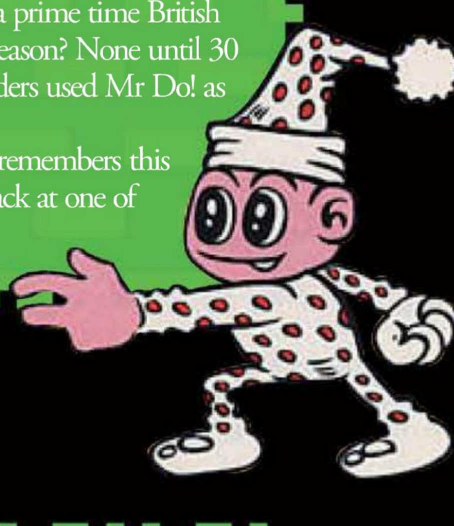
TERMINATOR 3: THE REDEMPTION
SYSTEMS: PS2, XBOX, NGC
YEAR: 2004

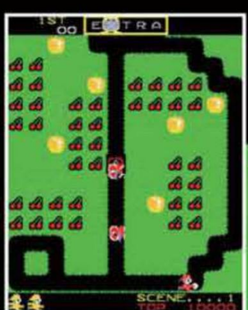


MR DO!

How many videogames are used as a metaphor in a prime time British soap opera at peak viewing time during the holiday season? None until 30 December 2005, when Dennis Rickman of EastEnders used Mr Do! as a metaphor for his life.

Taking his prompt from Dennis, who so obviously remembers this forgotten classic, Mike Tooley takes a fond look back at one of gaming's forgotten heroes. The lovable Mr Do!





» The first screen, the tunnels make the word DO



» An early videogame *Easter Egg* – only seasoned gamers could make Roses

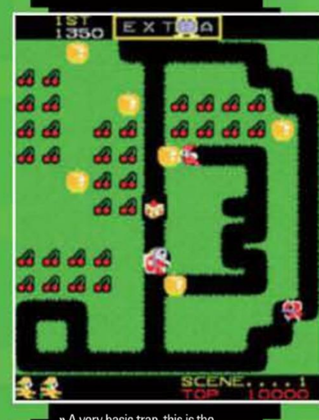
The singing and posturing of the lavish prince had stopped, now the infuriating lyrics of *Goody Two Shoes* looped from the mouths of babes. It's a time resplendent in revolution: Dr Rubik's cube passes into history, usurped by a plastic snake, a movie about an archaeologist is the cinema's film of choice. Not for the last time in its colourful history the arcade scene is struggling, with machines standing idle.

Unlike the future struggles of the arcade industry, however, the actual players are still there. The arcade is still the social place of choice for pre and early teens. Fickle at best, this generation is becoming tired of the games on offer. The industry is acutely aware of this and a slew of new titles hit the arcades mid '82 and, for the first time since the peak of the videogame boom, there is a choice. For every *Scramble* there is a *Space Panic*, for every *Tron* a *Popeye* and central to all that is new and shiny stands a clown, resplendent in red, carrying a power ball. He doesn't fit around here and, as the new kid in town often does, he draws a small crowd. "Mr Do!" Exclaim the kids, definitely not a local name….

So it was that in 1982 Universal released *Mr Do!* to the arcade-going public. It was to be its most commercially successful game of all 40 of its arcade releases and was one of that year's biggest-selling machines too – no mean feat when your stablemates included *Space Panic* (the first platform game) *Jumping Jack* and the totally forgotten *Devil Zone*.

Mr Do! wasn't an action game or a puzzle game as so many have labelled it since. In truth, *Mr Do!* qualifies with a few others to sit as a true genre miscreant. Maze game, shoot-'em-up, puzzle and strategy would all describe aspects of the gameplay, but there isn't a genre that encapsulates it all. Classic definitely, but there was so much more to it than other games that received a similar status. For many gamers, *Mr Do!* presented them with the true zenith of gaming way back in '82, and for some, the experience still hasn't been bettered.

The Attract mode offered few clues to *Mr Do!'s* gameplay mechanics; sure it showed Mr Do! walking around, digging and firing his power ball, dropping apples on foes and shooting letter monsters, but the Attract mode was nothing more than a teaser. It outlined the concept that lay beyond, but out of context, just as it managed to hide the deliciously mischievous level design.



» A very basic trap, this is the lifeblood of the game

"FOR MANY GAMERS, MR DO! PRESENTED THEM WITH THE TRUE ZENITH OF GAMING WAY BACK IN '82, AND FOR SOME, THE EXPERIENCE STILL HASN'T BEEN BETTERED"

» *Mr Do!* featured a variety of ways to clear each stage. Which did you use?



Unlike most games of the time, it provided gamers with a set of variables with which to experiment, the game world existed but there was no one predetermined path or goal. There were two basic ways to finish each scene: destroy all the meanies or harvest the cherries. Although *Mr Do!* always arrived armed with a power ball it was never enough to destroy all the bad guys, as it had a recharge penalty – the more you used it, the longer it took to recharge. In some respects the closer you came to nearing the end of a scene the further you were from it as you waited and waited for the ball to return to you.

Fortunately for would-be clowns and cherry farmers alike there was more at your disposal than just a bouncing power ball; namely apples. The fruit lay throughout every scene, randomly placed through the candy and formed the weapon of choice for our polka-dotted hero. A well-placed apple set over a tunnel could despatch multiple enemies as it dropped to the floor below.

Each scene would start with a candy field broken by a tunnel running through it. In the first scene the tunnel carves out the shape 'Do', thereafter the numbers two through to nine would present the tunnel shapes up to level ten, and then the game looped back to 'Do' and so on. Scattered throughout each scene were the apples and cherry patches. Mr Do! always started bottom centre of each scene, while the meanies spawned dead centre. This gave the player a few seconds to take in the surroundings and formulate a strategy before the meanies had actually spawned.

And that is where *Mr Do!* alienates as many as it endears.

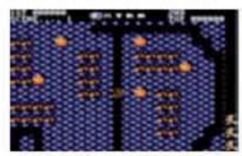
You see, you had to have a plan. And the first time you play any game you don't have one. Mr Do! couldn't run all the time, everything that spawned onto the screen chased him, the creatures didn't mill about aimlessly, they hunted the cute little clown down – and they were faster too. The candy fields provided some respite from the pace of the tunnels but only if Mr Do! had a good head start and time enough to get underneath and behind an apple. If the player got that far, the balance of power would shift. Safe in the short term, players could go about setting traps for the pursuing meanies and, as the last meanie spawned, you could see for sure how many more Mr Do! needed to despatch, and then the planning started again.

As the last baddie leaves the spawn point a treat appears. Not only did it provide the player with bonus points, it also froze all the on-screen meanies – though they were still deadly to touch. Upon taking the treat, a letter monster was released from the top of the screen with three henchmen. Able only to traverse the tunnels already carved out, this gang of four moved at twice the pace of Mr Do! and devoured any apples in their path, often nullifying traps along the way. After dispatching the letter, the game would return to normal, albeit at a more frantic pace. And thus the finely orchestrated dance would continue…

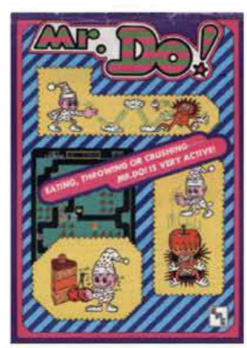
As players grow familiar with the concept, ever more lavish strategies emerge. The point scorers double their scores by killing only with apples, the runners would just harvest cherries, while the distance players would challenge their ability by clearing as many scenes as they possibly could. The distance players, as it turned out, were the players who truly mastered *Mr Do!* using an amalgamation of all the above known strategies to plunder further and further into the game.

The letter monster appeared every 5,000 points without his

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** UNIVERSAL
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **GENRE:** MISCELLANEOUS
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET



THE CLASSIC GAME

MR DO!

WHICH DO ARE YOU?

All major home formats have received a version of *Mr Do!*, however, most struggled to accurately convey the arcade games immediacy. The Commodore 64 had a fine version, perfect in every way except one. The playfield was delivered landscape not portrait, giving the player far too much room and making the game far too easy as a result. The BBC B had one of the best version in the cleverly titled *Mr Ee!* It was almost an exact port, only the name was changed, it looked and played exactly as the arcade machine, although the powerball recharge and bounce was wrong. Not until 1994 did the definitive home version arrive, on the Japanese-only Sharp X68000.



» Designers couldn't maintain the arcade's playfields on early hardware. Despite the games being competent, they lacked the key elements that made the arcade game so great.



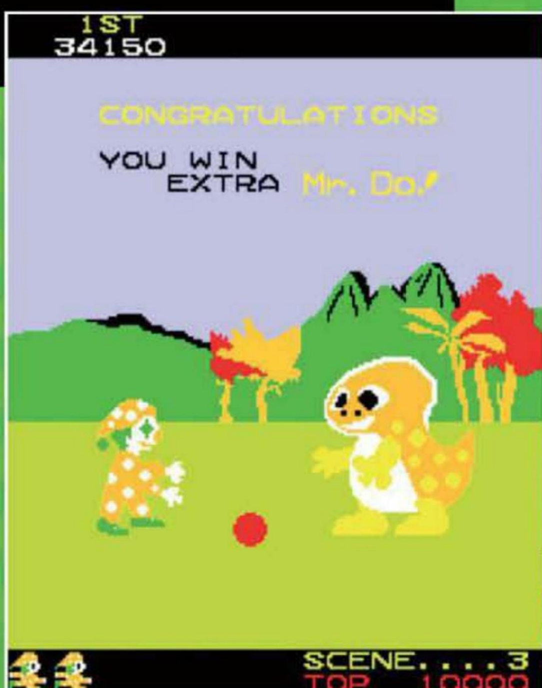
» Gamers were divided, was it a goading message or a compliment?

henchmen, each time the player destroyed a letter monster they were awarded that letter, until you eventually spelled out the word 'extra' resulting in an additional life to play with. Accomplished players could time the 5,000 point cycle and score so highly that they would receive a bonus life every couple of screens, certainly for the first 20 or so levels, anyway.

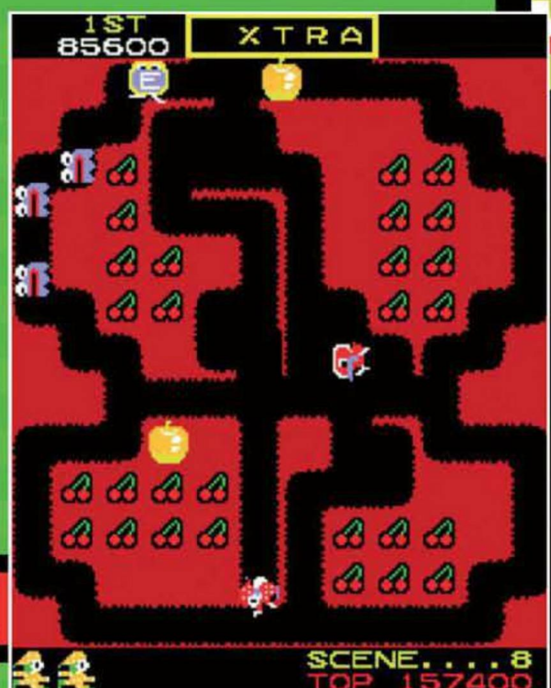
After clearing every third scene the player was rewarded with a simple cut-scene, a 'very good' message and a status report. Quick maths was applied to the status screen to work out how the game was going, had the player achieved enough extra lives to further the experience? Was there a need to amend the current strategy to add longevity? And so it went on, the player providing the critique for his own performance. The cut-scenes were much discussed at the time, not only because we hadn't seen them before, but because no one really understood the 'very good' message. Therefore, early in the game many believed it to be a goading message "very good, now try this". Whatever the real meaning for those that played and enjoyed *Mr Do!* there really was nothing else quite like it.

For those players with the temerity and reflexes to reach level 00 (100) another surprise lay in store, played out on the zero map the meanies spawned incredibly fast and then proceeded to run away from Mr Do!. In most games this would make things easy, in *Mr Do!* it served to unravel the winning formula that the player had used to progress so far, and the whole scene descended into a frantic run 'n' gun affair, usually resulting in many lost lives. Once scene 00 was completed, the game would loop back to 01 with more meanies and more pace than ever before.

The graphics, vibrant and crisp, relayed the action perfectly and well-defined sprites and impeccable animation executed a warning shot across the bows of the games that relied on star fields for backdrops. The music too, a short loop of The Can Can jollies that changed pace with the game's tempo, became frantic as the situation looked hopeless and gave way to its usual tempo as the player regained control of the situation. Raised slightly



» Cut-scenes in the early eighties. Extra men were vital for success in *Mr Do!*



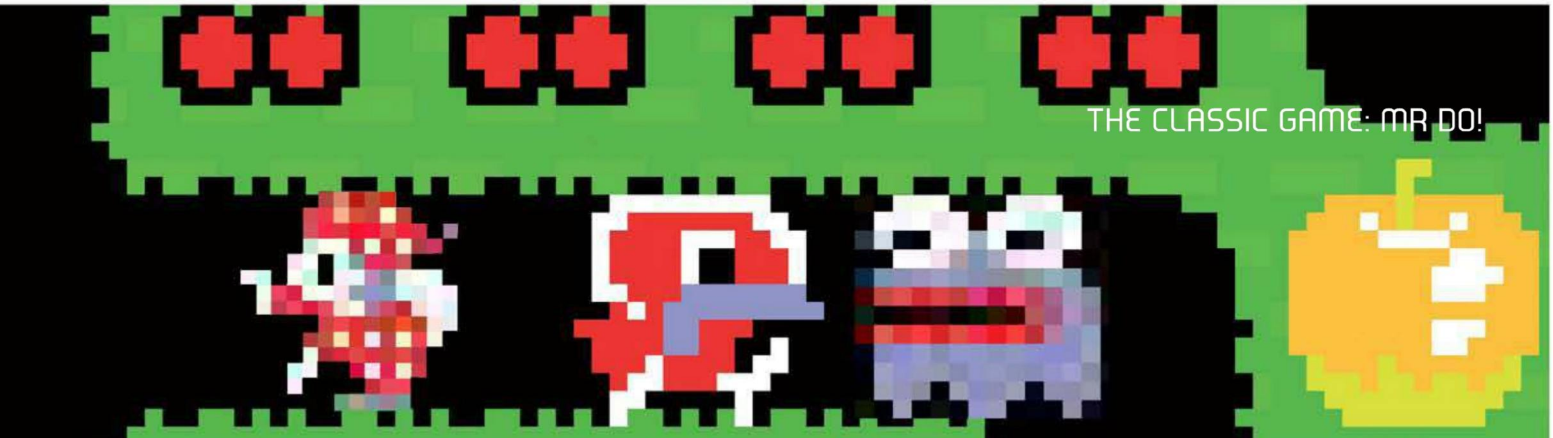
» The alpha monster and henchmen. The scene turns red and the beasties freeze

MORE MR DO!



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:

Do! Run Run 1984 Universal Arcade
Mr Do's Castle 1983 Universal Arcade converted to most home formats
Mr Do's Wild Ride 1984 Universal Arcade
Mr Do's Adventure 1985 Universal (never released)
Neo Mr Do! Visco Games Arcade Neo Geo



above the background music were some of the most musical sound effects ever used in a videogame. Clearing a cherry patch built a tune with a chime for sequence completion; the power ball's return was accompanied by a wholesome whooshing sound as it recharged, while the effect was reversed as it exploded into a foe. Apples dropped with cartoon-like falling sounds and even the main protagonist's death animation had comedy sound effects. At times it was impossible to keep your eye on the whole screen, but the sound effects let the player know what was happening.

As tough as the game ever got Mr Do!'s fate was always with the player. Death always came from a mistake that the player had made. Delightfully difficult, *Mr Do!'s* biggest failing is its greatest asset, the fact that it isn't instantly accessible to all. It remains a treasure trove of videogame genius that has been left for a lucky few to discover.

Some 22 years after I first met the little red clown, I'm still as enamoured with him as ever; *Mr Do!* wasn't made, he was crafted. The only gripe I've ever had is still there, though – the cabinets that housed him didn't save high scores, so you would leave an arcade with a top score of millions only to find it replaced the next day by a score of 10,000 points. But maybe that was part of the challenge…

LICENCE TO THRILL…

So successful was *Mr Do!* for Universal that the company's subsequent releases were redesigned to include the clown. A cursory glance at its post *Mr Do!* release schedule shows only four games that did not feature the clown released before its subsequent demise in '85. Although none of these games were true sequels they took on a classic status of their own and in truth each game would have been successful without the polka-dotted hero. By mid '84 Universal shifted its focus to technology and laser disc games in particular, the costs were to be offset by the release of *Mr Do's Adventure*. Unfortunately, the mid-Eighties game crash came and took Universal with it, and *Mr Do's Adventure* was never released. Some of Universals IP was sold to Taito and the rest went to Takkara. As IP ownership changed, more opportunities prevailed and THQ released *Mr Do!* on the SNES in 1996 some 14 years after its release. The following year saw a Visco remake of *Mr Do!* for Neo Geo. Moderately popular, the gameplay shifted to an isometric view but, despite the early play mechanics remaining, the charm of the original was gone.



"THE ATTRACT MODE WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A TEASER; IT OUTLINED THE CONCEPT THAT LAY BEYOND, BUT OUT OF CONTEXT, JUST AS IT MANAGED TO HIDE THE DELICIOUSLY MISCHIEVOUS LEVEL DESIGN"



» Not seen by many. Notice how it gives you an average score and time



» Every ten scenes the game loops, the apples relocate and the new colours keep it fresh





» The MSX home version played well and was very faithful to the arcade original, unlike the 2600 version



» While the Sharp version is considered to be superior, the SNES version is easier to source

» The closest home version pre-SNES. The BBC's *Mr Ee!* and the very Rare Gameboy *Mr Do!* play wonderfully, but are best viewed as a re-imagining

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SPACE PANIC
(1980, VARIOUS 8-BIT MACHINES)

TOP GEAR
(1984, ARCADE LASER DISC)

SUPER DON QUIXOTE
(1984, ARCADE LASER DISC)





BARBARIAN: THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR

OFF WITH HIS HEAD!



- **PUBLISHER** PALACE SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** COMMODORE 64
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

Okay, it's time to come clean. I didn't buy *Barbarian* because it featured cool graphics, a spookily eerie soundtrack or cracking gameplay. I simply picked it up because there was a nice pair of tits on the front cover…

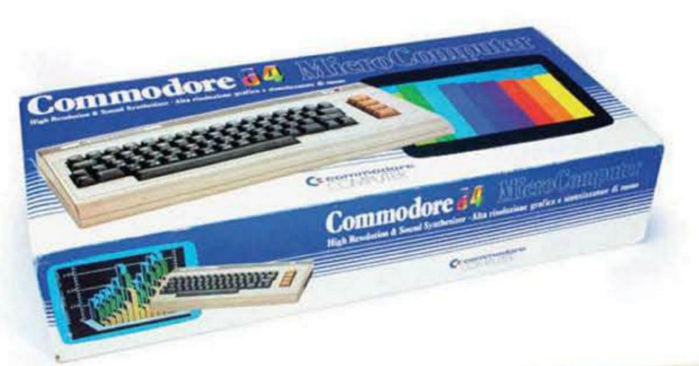
Maria Whittaker's dirty pillows aside, Palace Software's impressive fighter has stood the test of time rather well and even today manages to put up quite a stiff fight. Sure, its sword and sorcery shenanigans have been eclipsed by franchises such as *Soul Calibur* and *Samurai Shodown* but back in 1987, to play *Barbarian* was to witness a revelation. *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and *International Karate* (*IK+* was yet to arrive) may have come first and been just as good to play but they could never match the sheer brutality of *Barbarian*.

Vicious headbutts quickly sent your opponent reeling, while swift sword chops caused gouts of claret to gush from their various struck body parts. You may not have had any sort of force feedback back then but by golly you felt every last strike. The evil moves were further enhanced by some great sound effects that added an extra layer of hurt to the proceedings; particularly when you heard the frightening swish of the dreaded Web of Death…

Perhaps though, it was *Barbarian's* sheer unpredictability that allowed it to stand apart from its peers. Your barbarian's health was represented by six red spheres and every successful blow depleted half an orb, thereby effectively allowing you to absorb 12 hits before dying. Time an overhead chop correctly though and you could take your unfortunate opponent's head clean off his shoulders. Immediately ending the match. While you raised your sword in victory an ugly goblin loped towards the fallen body, kicked the severed head off-screen and removed the headless corpse.

In addition, constantly knowing that every move you made could potentially be your last, certainly elevated *Barbarian* above its many peers and gave it an edge that many other games since have sorely lacked.


00 00000



Year Released: 1982

Original Price: August 1982 ($595) (USA), December 1982 (£349.99) (UK)

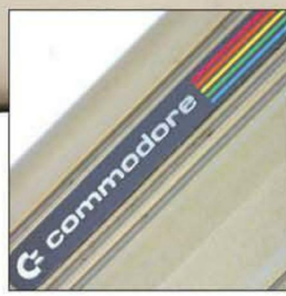
Buy it now for: £10-£15 (eBay)

Associated Magazines: Zzap!64, Commodore User, Commodore Format, Your Commodore

Why the C64 was great… The Commodore 64 was a jack-of-all-trades and a master of many. Success on both sides of the Atlantic meant its software library covered every genre, style and influence possible, with a panache most other machines struggled to equal. Despite Commodore's insistence on pushing it as a business computer with a price to match in the UK, it truly was the gaming platform to own. Even though it looked like a beige breadbin.









Commodore 64



WITH THE VIC-20 HAVING ENJOYED A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH AND SOME NEWLY DESIGNED CHIPS IN THE WINGS, COMMODORE WAS NOW WONDERING WHERE TO GO FROM THERE. MAT ALLEN LOOKS AT HOW ONE DECISION WAS THE GENESIS FOR ARGUABLY THE GREATEST AND BESTSELLING HOME COMPUTER EVER

Commodore was not immediately looking for a successor to the Vic-20. The launch had been a bigger success than expected, and work on the newly commissioned video and sound chips was reaching a conclusion. The new VIC-II video chip was an improvement on the chip inside the Vic-20 and utilised (or borrowed you might say) features from other leading computers and consoles of the time. The SID sound chip was something new, a three-channel synthesiser that would end up blowing away the competition for years to come.

Both chips had been scheduled for use in arcade or dedicated videogames. However, upon their completion in November 1981, Jack Tramiel, boss of Commodore, decided they would instead be used in the company's next home computer; a computer that he wanted to debut at the Las Vegas CES in January 1982. A computer that had yet to be designed! Not deterred, the machine was designed in two days and five prototypes were built by the end of the year.

With the Microsoft BASIC of the Vic-20 hastily rewritten for use on the new hardware, the machine was ready for show. Apart from the impressive specifications of the C64, which exceeded anything on the market, no one could understand how Commodore was proposing to sell it for just $595. Their jaws would have been through the floor if they'd known it would be initially manufactured for just $135.

The project and its inherent cost savings probably would not have happened without the acquisition of MOS Technology several years earlier. Not only did it have the expertise and experience, with many other companies using the 6502 CPU, but the production line facilities enabled chips to be manufactured a lot cheaper and quicker than other companies could achieve. Using the same case and keyboard as the Vic-20 was another factor; aside from halving the cartridge slot size to make way for an internal modulator, the design of both was actually somewhat similar.

The C64 went on sale in August 1982 and was an immediate success. A few issues had been fixed before launch, and a few,

Not so big in Japan

Many people don't realise Commodore launched the Vic-20 in Japan (as the Vic-1001) several months before it was available in the West in an attempt to acquire market share in the territory. With the imminent launch of the C64, Commodore had a second stab at Japan; however, the aim was to sell an entry-level machine at a much cheaper price than the C64 would be in the US.

The resultant MAX computer, encased in a membrane keyboard, was – hardware-wise – very similar to a normal C64. To save costs there was no serial port, no monitor port, virtually no RAM and no internal OS, meaning basically it was a console with a keyboard. Games could only be loaded from cartridge and the keyboard had little real use unless one of the limited programming modules was actually acquired.

Unsurprisingly the machine hardly sold and today commands a respectable collector value. Most of the games were programmed by HAL Labs (which is now with Nintendo) and are equally collectable. In a shrewd move, Commodore added a MAX mode to the C64 meaning that the cartridges will play fine on it.



APART FROM THE IMPRESSIVE SPECIFICATIONS OF THE C64, WHICH EXCEEDED ANYTHING ON THE MARKET, NO ONE COULD UNDERSTAND JUST HOW COMMODORE WAS PROPOSING TO SELL IT FOR JUST $595

commodore 64





One step beyond
Although technically superseded by the Amiga, the C64 was still going strong by 1990. Keen to capitalise on the machine's consistent popularity, Commodore commissioned an internal project to upgrade the computer for the new decade. The result was the C65, a machine with considerable power inside (such as the new VIC-III chip, VGA capability, greater RAM, and two SID chips for stereo sound), but with the ability to still play roughly three-quarters of the current C64 games.
Anticipation and excitement about the machine grew, as witnessed by copious letter writing to magazines at the time. And then for whatever reason it was cancelled in mid-1991, apparently at the request of then chairman Irving Gould in deference to keeping the C64 alive. The potential that the machine offered would never be realised.
That was not to say no one would get to play with the hardware. When Commodore was liquidated in 1994, many of the machines housed at its Toronto office sneaked out into the general domain and were rapidly grabbed by fans and collectors, though it was soon found many were in various states of completion and revision. Today it remains an interesting curio, one sadly that never came to be.

including the notorious "sparkle" effect, would be dealt with in the months immediately after. Most of these were fixed by the time the second revision (B) motherboard was produced. Revision A machines are today hard to find (estimated less than 0.2% of the 25-odd million production run) and are collectable because of their quirks and bugs.

From the off it was obvious Commodore (aka Tramiel himself) meant business and was going for the throats of the competition, especially Atari. The price of the C64 was down to $395 before Christmas, and was under $200 by 1985, with manufacturing costs cut by two-thirds. By that time the C64 was *the* home computer to own in the US. This was in contrast to the UK, where Commodore's operation was a little less price conscious. It stayed above the £200 mark for a long time, and peripheral prices were of a similar nature; at one point the disk drive cost more than the machine itself!

JAWS WOULD HAVE BEEN THROUGH THE FLOOR IF THEY'D KNOWN IT WOULD BE INITIALLY MANUFACTURED FOR $135

This does seem strange given the Commodore 64 had far more competition in Europe than in the US, especially from the Spectrum. While the C64 won the hearts of gamers in the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia, it was beaten to number one in several other countries including the UK, France and Spain. In the UK the battle was always with the Spectrum. At almost half the price for much of the Eighties, the Spectrum was a cheaper alternative that was also home to many classic games.

Why pick the C64 over the Spectrum? Anecdotal evidence points to its form and function as much as its power (the "real" keyboard being a selling point), with the price tag partly seen as a badge of status. Playground battles would be fought with both sides arguing their case, with levels of tribal loyalty and dedication rarely seen since. Technically, the C64 was streets ahead but there were aspects where the Spectrum was superior. That was mainly with isometric adventures, such as those perfected by Ultimate, and anything vector graphic driven. The design of the C64 was not suited to either. That wasn't to say it couldn't be done, as the classic *Mercenary* and the conversion of *Head Over Heels* demonstrated, bit the C64 made a better stab at anything coming its way from the Spectrum compared to anything going the other way.

However, C64 users in the UK didn't just have to rely on homegrown games to satisfy their needs. From early on, they were able to sample the delights of American games, courtesy of companies such as U.S. Gold and Ariolasoft releasing or importing them for sale. Some users, though, would take to importing the games themselves. Quite often this would be the case with some high profile titles, until the companies in question (Infocom, we're looking at you) decided to send them over here.

For the first couple of years of the C64's life, games from the likes of Epyx, Access, Synapse, Broderbund and Infocom were better than almost anything programmed in Europe. Watching *Impossible Mission*, *Beach-Head*, *Choplifter* or *Lode Runner* being demonstrated was amazing. This was also a time when Electronic Arts published innovative games such as *M.U.L.E.*, *Racing Destruction Set* and *Skyfox* instead of bundles of shovelware. Thankfully, programmers this side of the pond got their backsides in gear and started matching the imported efforts.

You have to begin with Jeff Minter, creator of weird addictive programs, who was given a C64 very early on as part of his deal with HES in the US. The three games *Ancipital*, *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* and *Iridis Alpha* are some of his best work and would have been hard to achieve on any other platform. He was just the first of many developers, as Tony Crowther (*Loco*, *Blagger*), Geoff Crammond (*Revs*, *The Sentinel*), Archer MacLean (*Dropzone*, *IK*), Jon Hare and Chris Yates (*Parallax*, *Wizball*) and Paul Woakes (*Encounter*, *Mercenary*) would all follow.

Just as can be seen between Western and Japanese game design today, there was a similar dichotomy in games produced here and over there. Different influences, different cultures, different trains of thought. There was also another good reason why the US produced the majority of the RPGs, strategy games and adventures: the disk drive. By 1984, the datasette had all but been abandoned by users and publishers alike in the US, whereas in the UK it was seen as a cheap method of storage pioneered by the continued success of other computers. There are numerous examples of two versions of a game being written, one example being the movie tie-in *Aliens*. The Electric Dreams UK version is a first-person adventure type affair, whereas the Activision US release is multiload and portrays the whole film in various stages. In terms of execution, the UK version recreates the terror of the film, whereas the US version is more "big-budget" but far less effective in its execution.

Like it or loathe it, the tape format would define the games written in the UK for the first few years of the C64's life, until the inevitable progress and demand for bigger games forced more multiload antics onto the hapless users. Let's face it, tape wasn't really cut out for that sort of access, but with the introduction of fast loaders into the UK



» C64 owners finally got a taste of Julian Gollop's genius when this masterpiece of strategic turn-based warfare was released for formats other than the Spectrum



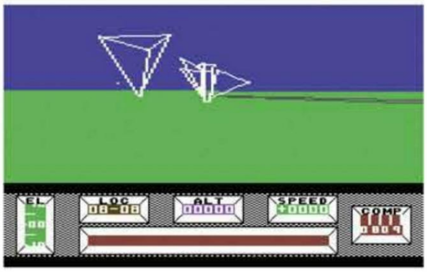
» No hardware is ever immune from controversy, and these three games are proof positive that clones can be as good as the real thing: *Cuthbert In The Jungle, Katakis, The Great Giana Sisters*





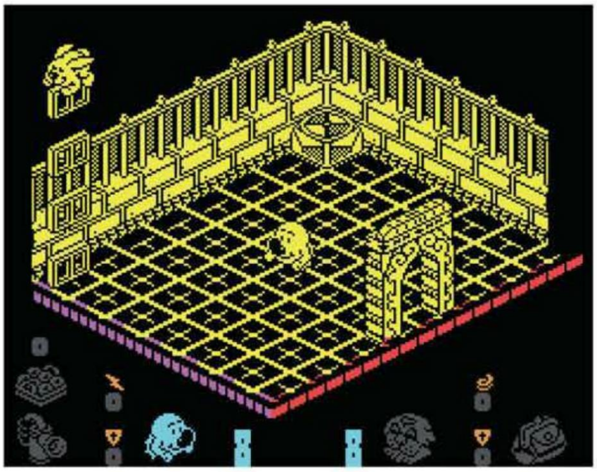


» Using the flexibility of the disk drive, there were some terrific and unique ideas prevalent on the C64, including this trio of releases from Activision: *Alter Ego (top left), LCP (above), Portal (bottom left)*



» Paul Woakes needs to be tracked down to explain just how he managed to fit a whole world of wonder into 64K of RAM. Who says the C64 can't do vectors?

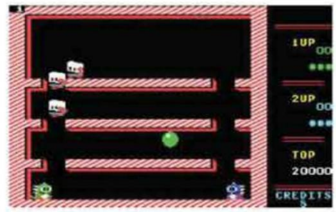
» A Spectrum conversion you all cry? For sure, but the C64 showed it was equal to the task of running the best software its rival had to offer



» All the Bs for arcade conversions, this set of three were some of the best realised on the limited, by comparison, hardware: *Buggy Boy, Bionic Commando, Bubble Bobble*







(another pioneering moment from Jeff Minter), things became a little more bearable.

Even at the peak of its popularity, it has been said that only around 10% of all C64 owners had a disk drive. Which, by the powers of deduction, means 90% were stuck with tape loading only. As mentioned earlier, this was mainly down to Commodore's high pricing policy in the UK. So, to accommodate this fact, it is no surprise that a lot of games were designed for single load only, squeezing as much as possible into that 64K (or less). The benefit to those who had access to both formats is obvious; the C64 repeatedly delivered quality games in all genres and interests and wasn't confined to a subset of possibilities.

Those Commodore 64 owners out there are already no doubt counting on their fingers all the games they loved and separating them into single and multiload. Unless you had a disk drive fairly early on, it would be expected that the single loaders are going to win out here. Anyone who played *Turbo Outrun* on tape will know how excruciating it could be (having said that, before fast loaders appeared, loading from a disk was almost as bad). Sometimes it was done right; having the next level load during sequences in *Dragon's Lair 2* or *Hawkeye* for example, or playing a small mini-game such as *Invaders* or *Painter*. It also gave rise to the "loader tune" to occupy gamers as they patiently waited for their latest epic to dribble into memory. Music for the C64 would turn out to be the defining point of its lifespan.

Aside from tapes and disks, the C64 could also use cartridges. Despite the number of games available being tiny compared to the overall catalogue (just some 300-odd releases), there were some great titles to be had, though many of them were only available on that format, and only available in the US. U.S. Gold did some balancing by releasing some of the Sega titles in the UK, Atarisoft published a few of its own in Europe and HES released games on tape, but the majority stayed behind.

Most of Commodore's own efforts can be ignored, although *International Soccer* is impossible to avoid and *Wizard Of Wor* is one of the best conversions available for the C64. Other titles people should look to grab from abroad include *Gyruss* by Parker Bros, *Diamond Mine* by Roklan, *Moondust* by Creative, *Maze Master* by HES and *Jumpman Junior* by Epyx. Look to Australia and cartridge versions of classics including *Leaderboard* and *Ghostbusters* can be found, as Home Entertainment Suppliers had a licence to produce them in the late Eighties.

EVEN AT THE PEAK OF ITS POPULARITY, IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT ONLY AROUND 10% OF ALL C64 OWNERS HAD A DISK DRIVE

Not all the important cartridges were games, however. Anyone with a disk drive needed a utility cartridge to go with it, and examples such as Datel's Action Replay, the Final Cartridge, the Expert and Super Snapshot were all good sellers. They not only performed quick copying of disks, but enabled pokes to be entered, had built-in fast loaders, allowed easy use of disk commands and more. In today's disk-heavy environment, they are an even more of a vital necessity.

The other essential weapon was the review magazine. After the success of *Crash* for



» Before *Micro Machines* came *Slicks*, a very similar game, and one of the best overhead racers available for the C64



commodore 64

SID IS UNIQUE. THERE WAS NOTHING LIKE IT BEFORE AND THERE HAS BEEN NOTHING LIKE IT SINCE



» **Above:** RPG fans were well catered for, with releases from Interplay, SSI, Origin and Electronic Arts, plus, more recently, the massive 14 disk home-brew epic *Newcomer*

Spectrum owners, Newsfield launched *Zzap!64* in April 1985, and for the next three or so years, it was the best thing on the planet – if you were a C64 owner, of course. With the attack of pointy hair and pointed words from the twin terrors of Gary Penn and Julian Rignall, gamers felt safe that if they said something was good, then it was going to be good.

The magazine lost its way after that point due to various changes, but was always a good read even if it some of its magic had gone. Coming late into the show was *Commodore Format*, which didn't launch until the end of 1990 when the C64GS was released. *Zzap!64* never really had a proper rival until then, so late in the C64's life there was suddenly some real competitive spirit. *Format* lasted until 1995, which was some going for a magazine with an 8-bit theme.

Despite the effort of magazines to keep gamers on the straight and narrow, some people still bought duff software. But there was method to the madness; it was all to do with the music. It may seem strange, but some games (*Comic Bakery*, *Miami Vice*, *Rambo* and *Knucklebusters*) despite being less than great, still sold rather well due to exceptional SID tracks. Music more than anything else elevated the C64 above its contemporaries and made playing games more than just bleeps and bloops. Where else has one chip inspired countless remixes, paid-for music albums, samples in commercial records, organised concerts and a professional mixing/composing station?

SID is unique. There was nothing like it before and there has been nothing like it since. There is a distinctive form to its sound and those musicians capable of extracting the most from it were almost heralded as gods at the time. Be it the frantic fast-paced nature of *Monty On The Run* (Rob Hubbard), the psychedelic trippy *Parallax* (Martin Galway), the oriental themes of the *Last Ninja* (Ben Daglish and Anthony Lees), the industrial drum-based rhythms from Matt Gray or Steve Rowlands's bouncy house-like tracks, there was something for everyone. Melody was key; many classic SID tracks are instantly hummable and maddeningly catchy.

Samples, in the form of instruments or voices, as part of the music became popular after Martin Galway and Chris Hülsbeck started using them in compositions in 1987. When utilised homogeneously, in such pieces as *Savage* and *Turbo Outrun* by the Maniacs of Noise or *Combat School* by Galway, they really added something to the end production. Unfortunately, Commodore fixed the bug in the 6581 SID chip that allowed samples to be played for the 8580 revision, meaning they became very quiet. Fortunately though, there is a solution available to fix this "problem".

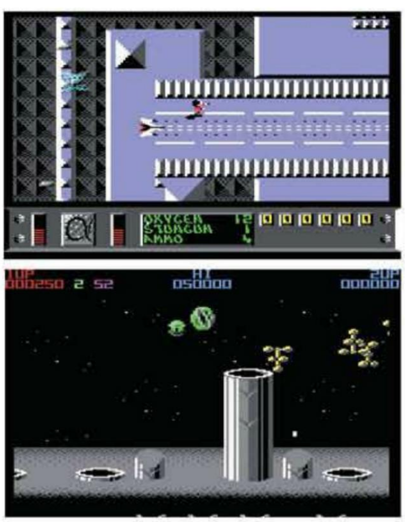
With the graphics, music and games making the C64 a global success, it may not be surprising that all of Commodore's 8-bit hardware that followed never came anywhere close. You could say that was partly due to its popularity – people saw no need to change, apart from going onwards to the Amiga or Atari ST. For example, the C16 and Plus 4 were nice machines but only ever occupied a niche market space that disappeared once the price of the C64 came down.

Whereas the C128 on paper looked an interesting prospect, the idea of a better equipped C64 with twice the memory and processor speed could have been seized upon by developers but never was. Very little C128-only software was written as users voted with their wallets and stuck with the C64 instead. Early on in the C64's life, Commodore marketed the SX64, an alleged portable version (or not, if you've ever tried carrying one about) of the hardware with a built-in monitor and disk drive. However, with an initial price tag in the US of just under $1,000 (and a similar value here), it was never destined to sell in large amounts. Having said that, it isn't difficult to find them being sold privately today in the US or Germany.

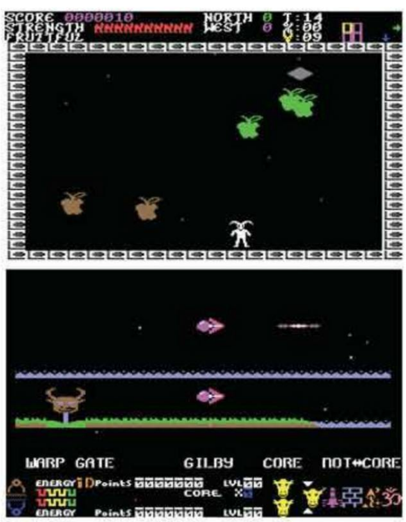
Commodore's biggest error was trying to compete for the space occupied by Sega and Nintendo in the console market. It is similar to the mistake committed by Amstrad with the GX4000. The idea of attracting those users across was sound but, in true Commodore fashion, it got the execution horribly wrong. The main problem was the price of the new C64GS (Games System) unit; at £100 it was only just less than a normal C64 bundle. The joystick included with the console was horrible and, with the lack of a keyboard, many of the older cartridges could not be played properly.



» The C64 was still home to new development talent into the Nineties as witnessed by the Rowlands brothers' games, which always had the highest production values possible



» Sensible Software was known for producing unsensible games, including the two that kick-started its success: *Parallax* and *Wizball*



» Jeff Minter was behind the C64 after progressing from the Vic20 and all of his games for the machine have a unique quirkiness about them



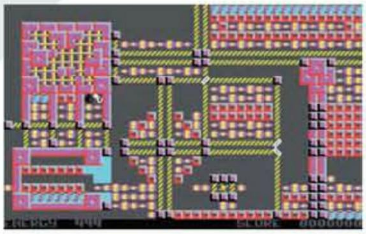
» Indescribably brilliant, and a concept seldom used since. Control the influence device to destroy or take over all of the rogue droids aboard eight ships







» Just about every C64 owner will have played *International Soccer* at some point, but there were other great cartridges to get, including the conversion of *Wizard Of Wor* and Ocean's range for the 64GS





» Just because it was budget did not mean it was bad. There were a number of undiscovered gems including *Spore* and *Warhawk*, plus the best-value game ever, *Thrust*

It did kick off the interest in cartridge-based games again, albeit briefly, and there were some excellent new titles available for a slightly higher than expected price tag – the majority coming from Ocean. There was also a lot of confusion at the time as many people thought the new cartridges would not work with a normal C64; as a remedy, many games had stickers positioned prominently on the front, pointing out they could be used with any machine. In the end, though, roughly a third of the 100,000 units manufactured were sold, with the rest being broken down for use in C64C models instead.

The C64 had already been given an update in its own right in 1987 with the introduction of a new slimline design to match the Amiga – and a slight name change to the C64C. The internals of the machine were redesigned and decreased chip-wise, along with the SID revision, although some early C64C models do have the 6581 inside. It was still business as usual for sales and the C64 was still popular despite the release of vastly more powerful hardware and consoles experiencing a resurgence. It was also a reason why the C65 project was cancelled (see boxout on page 110).

Where the C64GS had failed in attracting the next generation, the ordinary C64 succeeded. With the turn of the decade, interest in the ageing technology would be expected to decrease, and yet younger users were just taking their first steps. On their heels was a new set of programming talent looking to keep the machine alive, and maybe show a few tricks that established teams would utilise themselves. If games such as *Turrican*, *Turbocharge*, *Mayhem In Monsterland*, *Battle Command* and *Elvira 2* had been released earlier in the machine's lifespan, who knows where development could have led. What is certain is that constant innovation and experimentation with the hardware made it do things the designers never conceived as being possible.

In 1993, Commodore announced it was finally halting production of new C64 units. Eleven years is a long time in today's terms for manufacturing essentially the same piece of hardware. It even managed to outlive Commodore's own demise the following year, as commercial software was still available to buy into 1995. From then on though, it was the era of homebrew and fans supporting the machine.

Homebrew is merely a technical term for it, as unlike the Atari 2600 or NES, ordinary users were programming their own games and selling them (and many did) since the launch of the C64. Without the support of retail shops, it meant distribution went back to being word of mouth, mail order and private advertisements. In the last ten years, thanks must go to Russ Michaels (Electric Boys Software) and Jon Wells for pioneering the process and today there are several groups releasing "for money" software, including Protovision and Cronosoft, along with many others doing it for free.

One thing is also certain: a disk drive is an essential part of owning a C64 today and is now highly affordable. With the efforts of groups such as Gamebase64 and individuals such as Peter Rittwage to document and preserve all games ever released, and cables available from various outlets, programs can be transferred from PC to real floppies easily to play on a proper C64. Many new game releases are disk only. Like many other 8-bit machines, the future is still active and bright for hardware that is rapidly approaching its 25th birthday.

CONSTANT INNOVATION AND EXPERIMENTATION WITH THE HARDWARE MADE IT DO THINGS THE DESIGNERS NEVER CONCEIVED AS BEING POSSIBLE

I want my DTV

The origins of the DTV (Direct-To-TV) unit lie with the C-One project, created and designed by Jeri Ellsworth. Conceived as a way to emulate the C64 as closely as possible through software, it eventually progressed into a platform capable of handling many other formats due to the unique nature of its powerful design. Although the C-One was aimed at a developers' market, it did not go unnoticed. Mammoth Toys signed a deal with Ellsworth to produce a computer-on-a-chip version for use in a self-contained games joystick, similar to many already sold by companies such as Jakks Pacific. With the project completed in a few months, it went on sale just before Christmas 2004 and sold more than a quarter of a million units.

The later PAL version has several improvements and a more refined games line-up, making it the preferential choice of purchase. Not only are there several Easter Eggs to find, the unit is also fairly easy to hack and alter due to its C-One origins, meaning among other things, new software can be loaded into the unit and extra joystick ports added for two-player games. The C64 lives on, though maybe not quite in the format people expected!

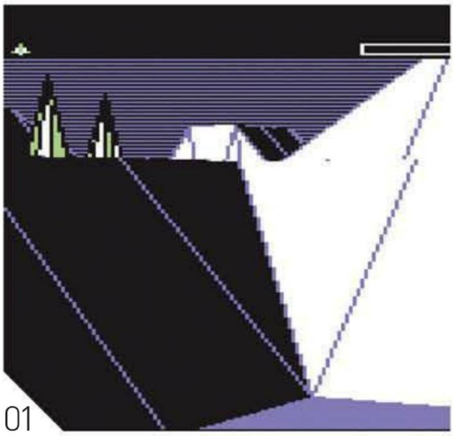




commodore 64

PERFECT TEN GAMES

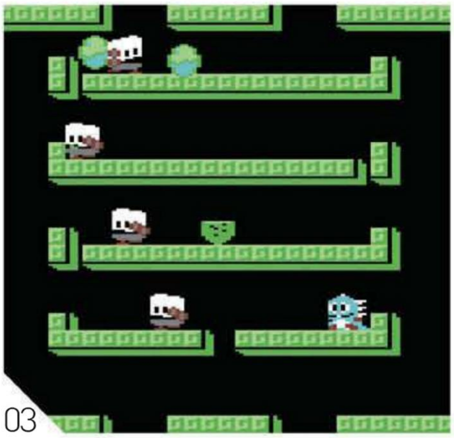
The Commodore 64 has a staggering selection of great games, so choosing a top ten was always going to be a tricky process. Before you all write in and complain though, just remember that these are opinions only and no harm is meant…



01



02



03



04

THE SENTINEL

- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD
- » **CREATED BY:** GEOFF CRAMMOND
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STUNT CAR RACER

01 **Geoff Crammond's name may be synonymous with racing games, but when he wasn't pouring his heart and soul into his latest *Grand Prix* title, he was adept at turning his hand to all sorts of different genres, with *The Sentinel* being a perfect example of his handiwork.** Haunting and with a meticulously designed game engine that gives a tremendous sense of scale and depth, Crammond's *Sentinel* was one of the best strategy games on the C64 – although to be fair, it initially appeared on the BBC Micro – and even today offers a worryingly addictive challenge. Best of all, emulation means you no longer have to endure those lengthy screen loads. Lovely!

IK+

- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SYSTEM 3
- » **CREATED BY:** ARCHER MACLEAN
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MERCURY

02 **There had been previous games involving the slamming of bodily appendages against each other, in a sweaty contest of stamina and skill, but it was Archer Maclean's *IK+* that was first to ménage-à-trois with the concept – metaphorically speaking, of course.** It revolutionised the mechanics of games like *Way Of The Exploding Fist* and *Karate Champ*, and also did incredibly well on the humble C64. Music was by Rob Hubbard and, while there was only one background, it was filled with many clever Easter Eggs (those joyous bonuses you could spend months discovering). The fluidity of control made it easy to initially play but this was backed up by a complex system that rewarded continued practice. A classic.

BUBBLE BOBBLE

- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** FIREBIRD
- » **CREATED BY:** SOFTWARE CREATIONS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SLY SPY: SECRET AGENT

03 **There have been plenty of classic coin-op conversions on Commodore's mighty 8-bit, but *Bubble Bobble* ranks as one of the best.** From its cute, vibrant – if slightly squashed looking – visuals to the outstanding, bouncy music, the C64 perfectly captured the spirit of the original arcade hit and proved to be the perfect game to show off to your Spectrum and Amstrad owning mates. It might not feature all the secrets that appeared in the original arcade game and having to press up on the joystick in order to jump is no substitute for a proper fire button, but if you're looking for an extremely competent conversion of a classic arcade hit, look no further. A superb conversion that shouldn't be missed.

MAYHEM IN MONSTER LAND

- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** APEX COMPUTER PRODUCTIONS
- » **CREATED BY:** CREATURES 2
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CREATURES

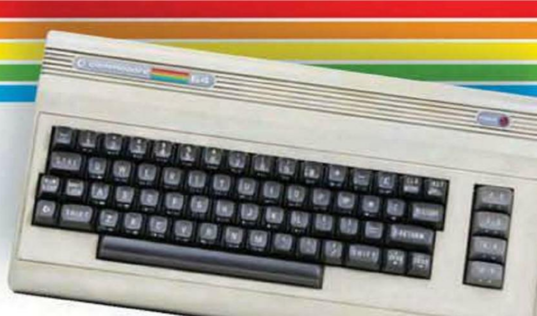
04 **There was no question of this not making the Top 10, what with it being regarded by many as the C64's last great release both in terms of gameplay and sheer technical achievement.** As most already know, it infamously used a "bug" in the graphics chip, which allowed entire screen scrolling and therefore much smoother and faster gameplay. Despite being a C64 title it has all the speed and tactile control you'd expect from an early 1990s platformer, which not only guarantees it a place here but also means it's still great to play even today. Being a dinosaur and returning colour to the land has never been such fun.

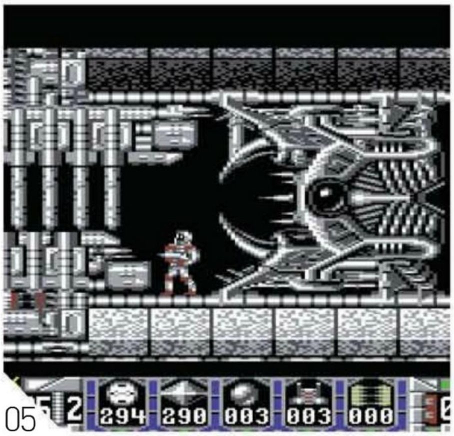
TURRICAN

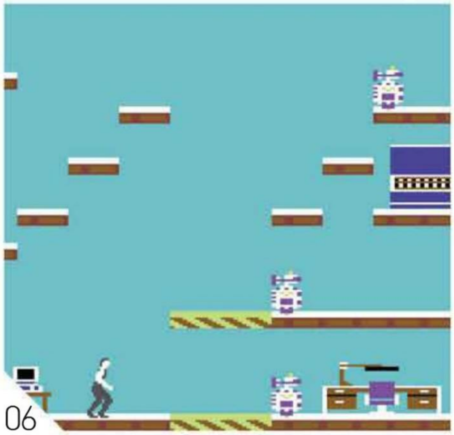
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** RAINBOW ARTS
- » **CREATED BY:** MANFRED TRENZ
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS

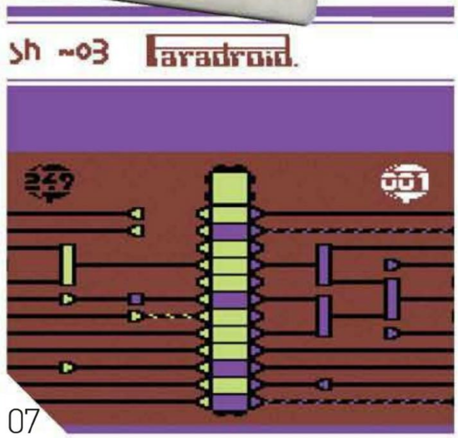
05 **There's an unwritten law in videogames that states: all C64 lists must feature at least one Manfred Trenz game.** While many will no doubt argue that Trenz's *Turrican II* is clearly the better game, we've decided to stick with the original, mainly because there was nothing quite else like it when it first appeared in 1990. It may well have borrowed heavily from obscure coin-op *Psycho-Nics-Oscar*, but Trenz's technical wizardry of Commodore's machine simply blew us away, and it still manages to impress today.

Part platformer, part shooter, *Turrican* features incredible visuals, a stunning score by music maestro Chris Hülsbeck and some of the most frenetic gameplay around. It fully deserves every accolade that has been bestowed on it.




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IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** US GOLD
» **CREATED BY:** DENNIS CASWELL
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PHASER PATROL

06 We featured a Making Of article on Dennis Caswell's timeless classic in Issue 22, so by now, all of you should have had a chance to experience this classic game. *Impossible Mission* was a perfect blend of joystick-waggling dexterity (especially when avoiding the terrifying spheres of floaty-electric-death) and tricky puzzles (many had problems with the final password-piece assembly). Although its premise of searching furniture (to find those elusive passwords) and avoiding robots may sound nauseatingly simple, it made for a game that was easy to get into but difficult to put down. Although ported to several other systems, for us the C64 original is still the best version.

PARADROID

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** HEWSON
» **CREATED BY:** ANDREW BRAYBROOK
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** URIDIUM

07 Ask any C64 owner to name their favourite games and chances are that this superb effort from Andrew Braybrook will almost always make their top five. Taking control of a weak prototype droid, your aim is to simply clear each boarded spaceship (of which there are eight) of its out-of-control robots. While your droid is woefully underpowered (even Dusty Bin could have it in a scrap) it does retain the unique ability to transfer itself into any available droid (albeit for a limited amount of time). This enables it to take out the ship's more dangerous foes (via a charming mini-game) and adds a interesting play mechanic. With its subtle blend of strategy and blasting, *Paradroid* deserves to be in every C64 owner's collection.

WIZBALL

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PARALLAX

08 Playing *Wizball* was a rite of passage for many Commodore 64 owners and became more than ample ammunition for those who wanted to taunt their CPC and ZX Spectrum owning peers. Insanely smooth scrolling, a scintillating soundtrack from the always dependable Martin Galway and its slick blending of genres means that *Wizball* will forever remain within the higher echelons of Commodore 64 classics. It might well have taken a while to get used to your ball's incessant bouncing but once you finally mastered it and collected a few power-ups, *Wizball*'s true identity and depth are revealed. Quite possibly one of the most beautifully crafted C64 games that you'll ever have the privilege to play.

PROJECT FIRESTART

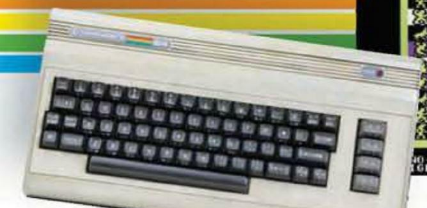
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** DYNAMIX
» **CREATED BY:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RISE OF THE DRAGON

09 Many games claim to have pioneered the survival-horror genre but, while others came before it, *Project Firestart* is one of the very best and is still supremely enjoyable today. Your task is to dock with a research vessel in space and find out why there's been no communication. From the start, when you see the body of a dead crewmember who has written the word "danger" in their own blood, you know it's going to be an incredibly tense mission with plenty of twists and turns. Throughout the ship are mutilated bodies, log reports, even a survivor; then you encounter the terrifying invisible enemies, which randomly appear. Multiple endings guarantee regular returns to that hellish place.

ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS

» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHED BY:** LUCASARTS
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MANIAC MANSION

10 It's only fair to list one of LucasArts' excellent games. But we can already hear a great disturbance, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror, due to our choice. Yes, we could have listed *Maniac Mansion*, but everyone knows *Maniac Mansion*. *Zak McKracken* is arguably just as good, and the journalistic setting struck a chord in the office. Traversing the entire globe, Zak encounters aliens disguised with Groucho Marx-style nose-glasses and cowboy hats. Throw into the mix wacky sidekicks, a bus that travels to Mars, plus some bitingly witty newspaper headlines and you have one hell of a crazy adventure.



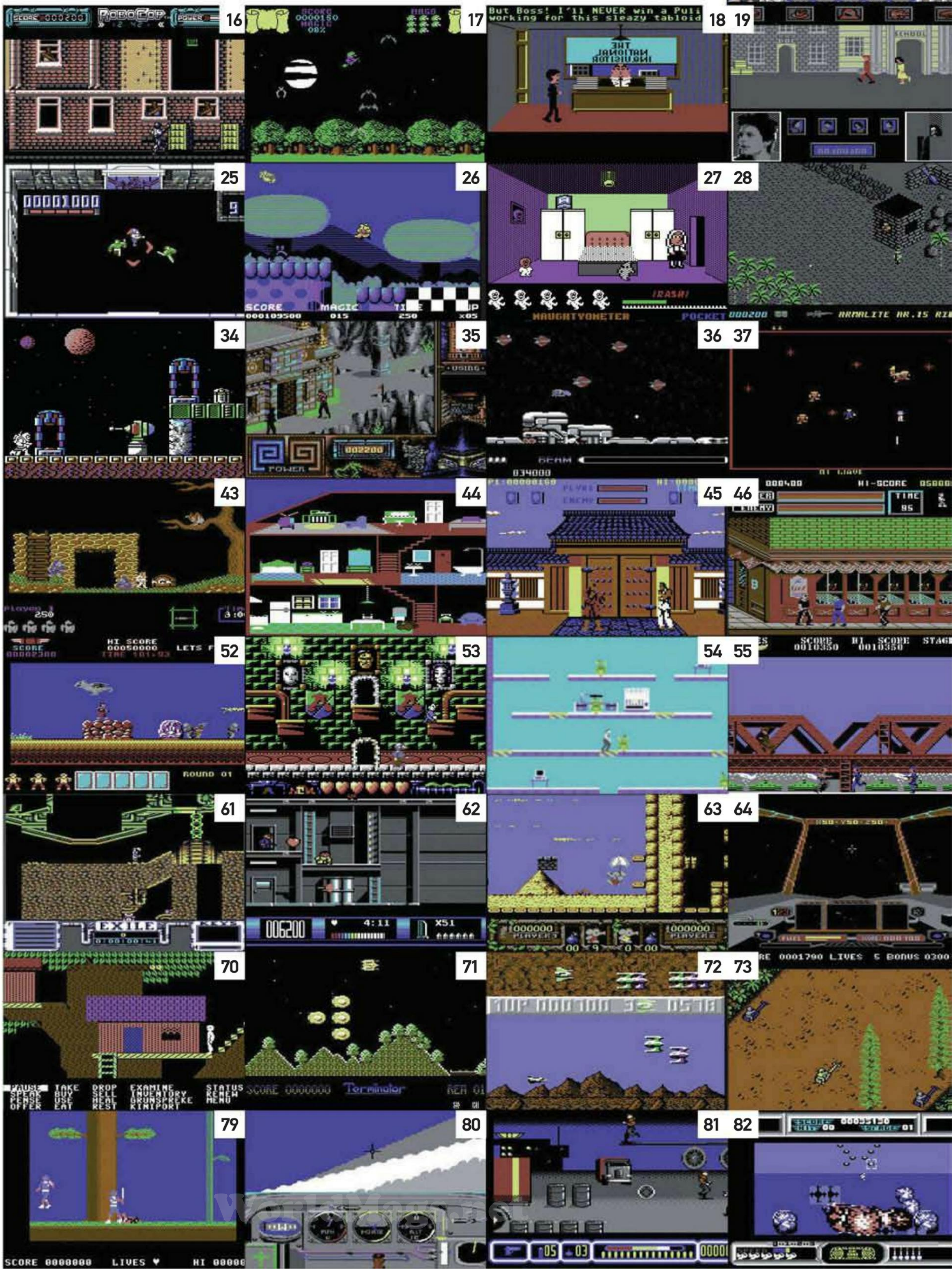


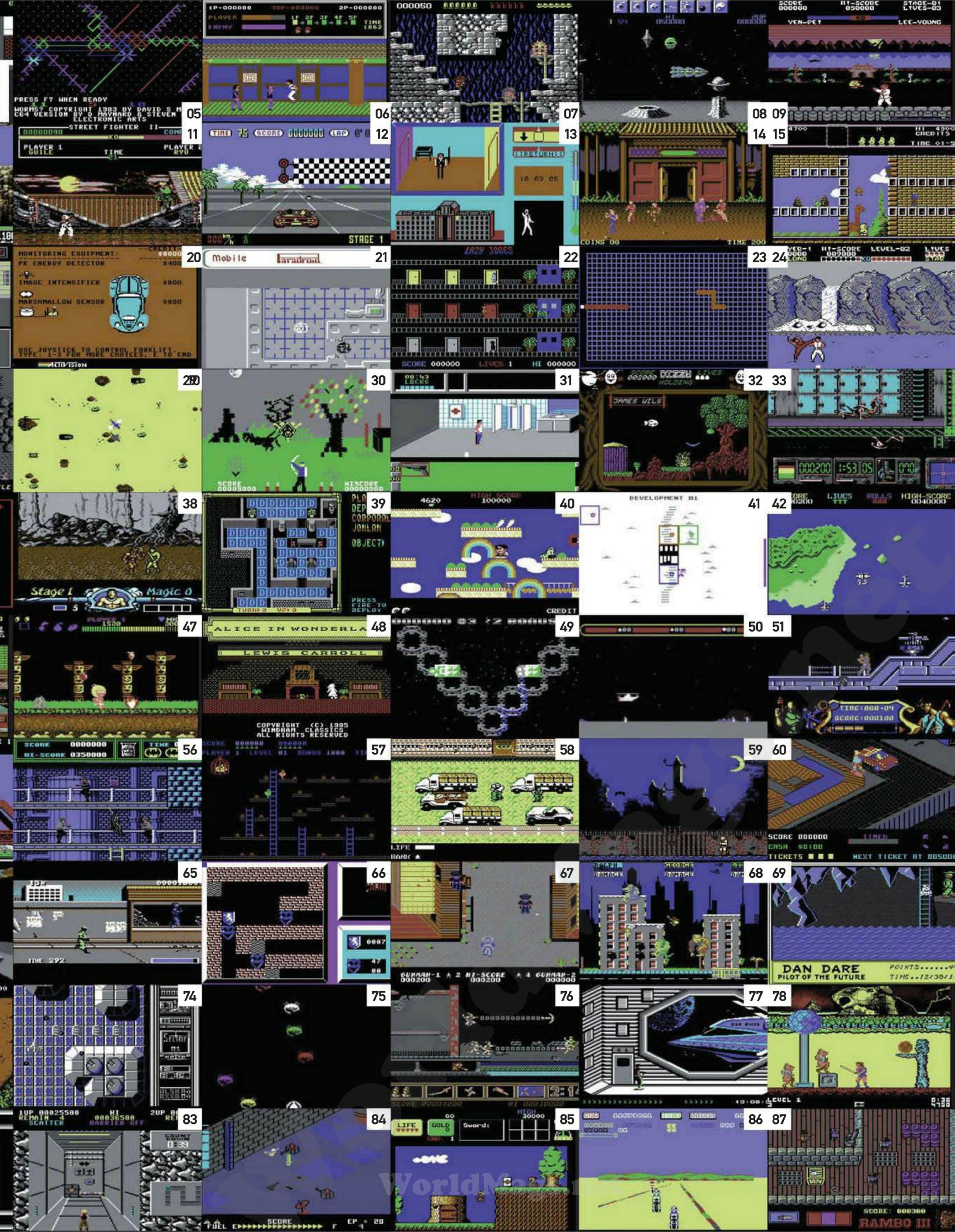
Commodore 64 and the rest...

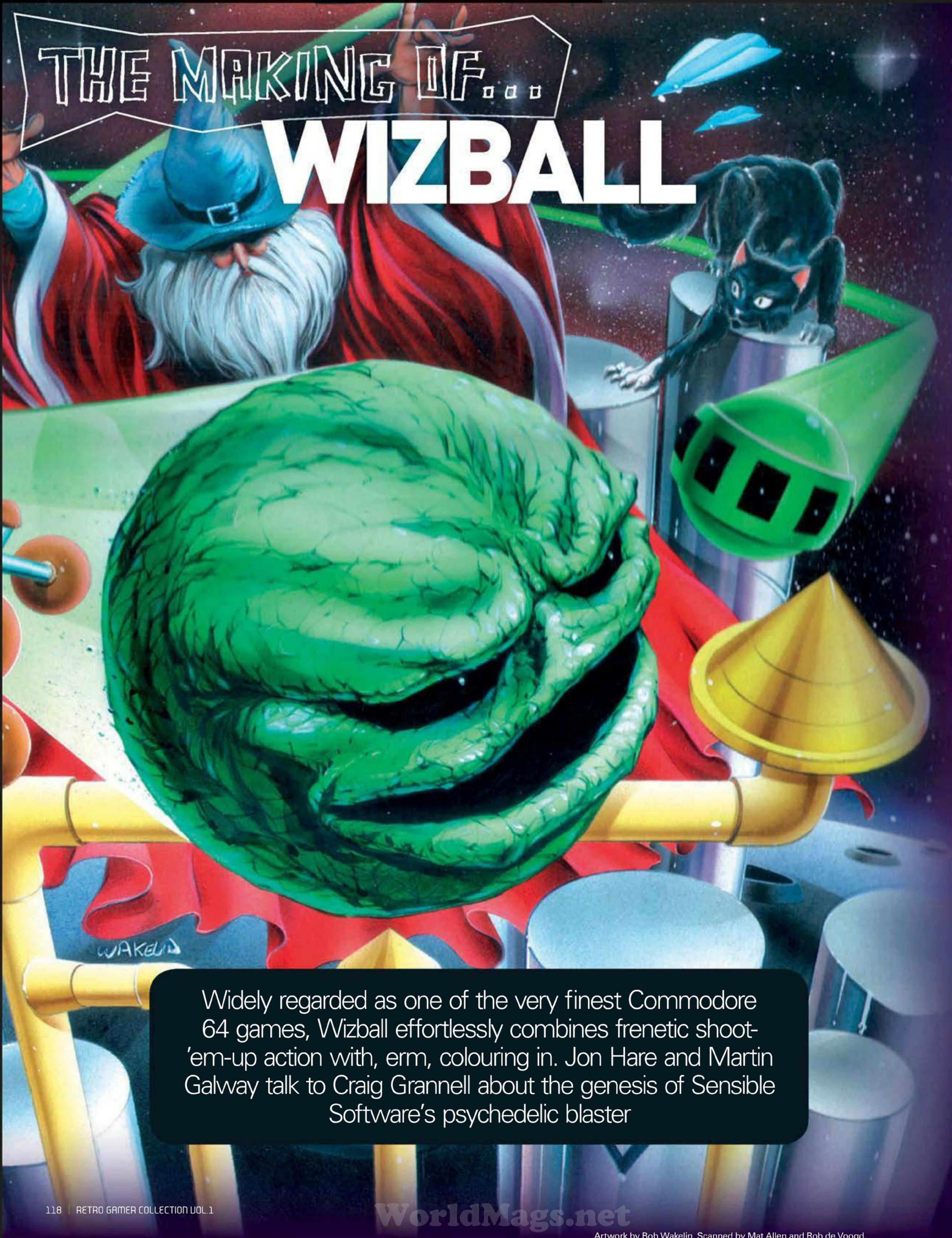
Loved by all who were fortunate enough to own one (and coveted by those who weren't) Commodore's C64 is one of gaming's greatest success stories and boasts a stunning array of classic titles. How many did you own?



01 ARCHON
02 HARD HAT MACK
03 JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL
04 SKATE OR DIE!
05 WORMS?
06 KUNG-FU MASTER
07 RICK DANGEROUS
08 WIZBALL
09 YIE AR KUNG FU II
10 TURRICAN
11 STREET FIGHTER II
12 OUTRUN
13 A VIEW TO A KILL
14 DOUBLE DRAGON III
15 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
16 ROBOCOP
17 CAULDRON
18 ZAK MCKRACKEN
19 BACK TO THE FUTURE
20 GHOSTBUSTERS
21 PARADROID
22 LAZY JONES
23 TRON
24 YIE AR KUNG FU
25 SMASH TV
26 MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
27 JACK THE NIPPER
28 ARNIE
29 G.I. JOE
30 FORBIDDEN FOREST
31 DIEHARD
32 DIZZY
33 ALIEN 3
34 EXOLON
35 LAST NINJA 3
36 R-TYPE
37 ROBOTRON 2084
38 GOLDEN AXE
39 LAZER SQUAD
40 RAINBOW ISLANDS
41 M.U.L.E
42 1942
43 GHOULS 'N GHOSTS
44 LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE
45 STREET FIGHTER
46 VIGILANTE
47 WONDERBOY
48 ALICE IN WONDERLAND
49 CARGO
50 CHOPLIFTER
51 STRIDER
52 RYGAR
53 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
54 IMPOSSIBLE MISSION
55 RUSH'N ATTACK
56 BATMAN
57 CHUCKIE EGG
58 METAL GEAR
59 CASTLEVANIA
60 - 720 DEGREES
61 EXILE
62 LETHAL WEAPON
63 CJ'S ELEPHANT ANTICS
64 STARFOX
65 NINJA WARRIORS
66 XOR
67 GUN SMOKE
68 RAMPAGE
69 DAN DARE
70 BELOW THE ROOT
71 TERMINATOR
72 SANXION
73 RETURN OF THE JEDI
74 XENON
75 DEMONS OF OSIRIS
76 NINJA SPIRIT
77 PROJECT FIRESTART
78 THUNDERCATS
79 LEGEND OF KAGE
80 ACE OF ACES
81 DIEHARD 2
82 AFTERBURNER
83 GRYZOR
84 ZAXXON
85 WONDERBOY: MONSTER LAND
86 SUPER HANG-ON
87 RAMBO III




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THE MAKING OF… WIZBALL

Widely regarded as one of the very finest Commodore 64 games, Wizball effortlessly combines frenetic shoot-'em-up action with, erm, colouring in. Jon Hare and Martin Galway talk to Craig Grannell about the genesis of Sensible Software's psychedelic blaster

Artwork by Bob Wakelin. Scanned by Mat Allen and Rob de Voogd.



» As if later levels weren't hard enough, even the paint drops have it in for you, spraying bullets everywhere



» Back in the lab, Wiz readies a colour to apply to the current level, while his trusty cat laps up a saucer of milk



Labelling *Wizball* a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up is like dismissing *The Godfather* as a gangster flick. Sure, Sensible Software's classic C64 effort has waves of enemies, power-ups and plenty of frenetic blasting action, but it goes above and beyond its contemporaries in so many ways. Taking control of Wiz, a wizard who has a bizarre penchant for travelling around in a green ball, you're tasked with bringing the colour stolen by the evil Zark back to the previously vibrant Wizworld. Rather than collecting components required to complete levels in a conventional manner, you shoot paint-blob enemies (who eventually gain a survival instinct, rather unhelpfully firing back on later levels), and use 'Catelite' (Wiz's pet cat, Nifta, encased in a flying green orb) to collect the paint drops. These are mixed in the Wizlab and applied to the current level. Three colours are required to complete each of the eight levels and progress is punctuated by 'filth raids' (psychotic flying 'police' aliens that spew bullets) and frantic bonus rounds.



» The Wizball bounces around, but control can be gained by collecting two pearls and doing some swift waggling

With so many ideas shoehorned into the game, it's not surprising that *Wizball*'s development ethos was very different to that used for contemporary games. "*Wizball* was put together in a very organic way," explains Jon Hare. "It started as a *Nemesis*-inspired shooter – hence some of the enemy waves – and a bouncing control method that Chris [Yates] was playing with." From there, the concept grew, incorporating the game's most obvious differentiator: colouring the levels. "This seemed like a neat idea, and a good mechanic for level progression, along with giving us something novel for enemies to drop when destroyed," says Hare. However, the paint collecting initially worked very differently. "In the early stages, *Wizball* had underground caves – something later used in *Wizkid* – where the Wizball grew a body and went exploring for coloured drops to fill the landscape in," remembers Hare. Memory restrictions led to the now-familiar paint-blob aliens and the introduction of Catelite as a means of collecting the drops. "Catelite was a nice control idea – probably Chris's – and the cat character was based on Chris's cat Nifta, who was always around when we were making games," says Hare. "Once the cat was there, he became the obvious paint collector, with the paint drops becoming similar in concept to humans in *Defender* or babies in *Insects In Space*. As Chris and I had been playing co-op *Dropzone* a lot at the time, we decided to add a co-op two-player mode, enabling one player to control Catelite. It fitted together neatly, like most good design ideas do!"

Rather than paint-blob aliens being randomly distributed throughout the current level, Sensi decided to further break from tradition, providing players



» Even on lowly level two, plenty of Zark's minions are out to destroy your exterior design plans



» Frenetic blasting action in *Wizball*'s meteor-strewn bonus round, which offers the chance to bag an extra life



» As a one-player game, you have to balance Wiz's survival with the need to grab falling paint drops with Catelite

IN THE KNOW



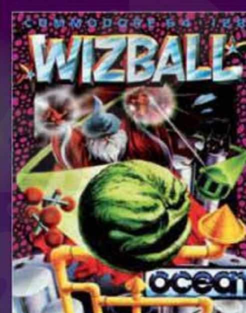
» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

» **RELEASED:** 1987

» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2



DEVELOPED BY

S.E.U.C.K.
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1987

SENSIBLE SOCCER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1992

CANNON FODDER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1993



THE MAKING OF... WIZBALL



BOUNCY (WIZ)BALLS

Although enjoyed by the majority of those who've experienced it, *Wizball* has left a sour taste in the mouths of some gamers – mostly those who can't get to grips with its control method. Initially, the Wizball bounces around the landscape and off objects, but as the handy 'Wiztips' screen shows, two of the earliest power-ups available are 'thrust' (which provides 'in-flight' control) and 'anti-grav' (which provides full, standard eight-way control over the Wizball). On lower levels, eight of the aliens that always leave pearls behind when shot are immediately available, making it pretty easy to get anti-grav working, although if you've no permanent power-ups on later levels, a bouncing Wizball spells almost certain doom. "We thought the bouncing emphasised the uniqueness of the game," explains Hare. "Also, it was a good point to drop you back to, to penalise you for poor play!"





» Catelite makes a beeline for a grey paint drop, which will make him 'indescructacat'

with three 'active' levels, accessible via a network of 'up' and 'down' entrances. "This came from a definite desire to break up the standard level flow, but it also aided the RGB colouring-in factor – we needed to ensure there was always an available level dominated by red blobs, one by green and another by blue," explains Hare. Therefore, completing the lowest active level rendered it inactive – empty of all enemies – but unlocked the next higher level, with tougher enemies and trickier-to-navigate landscapes.

These ideas provided layers of strategy. Along with trying to keep Wiz alive – one hit from a bullet or enemy causes the Wizball to explode in a shower of shards – you have to look out for and protect Catelite. Without the ever-faithful cat (who is rather more durable than Wiz, expiring after losing nine lives), paint-collection – and therefore, progress – isn't possible, but if Wiz's lives are all lost, the game is over. *Wizball* is a juggling act – a mix of blasting, quick



» Wiz mercilessly slaughters some helpless hoops, thinking how great it would be if none of Zark's minions could fight back

dives with Catelite to grab falling paint drops, and regular retreats from hordes of hostile enemies. Later levels require regular trips between active levels, as the colours require elaborate mixing, and over-cautious players are hampered by the aforementioned filth-raids, should an enemy not be dispatched for a period of time. Additionally, players must be eagle-eyed when grabbing paint drops, because five non-standard colours randomly appear. Two are 'friendly': a white drop provides the player with a bonus Wizball and a grey drop increases the cat's number of lives. However, three unfriendly colours lurk: purple drops make the cat crazy, sending it zipping around the screen, until it expires from damage; a light-blue drop causes a major filth raid, with multiple 'police' ships; and a black drop makes the landscape invisible. "The filth-raid and mad cat are classic Sensi touches from the old days when fun was allowed, without it having to be built into a milestone schedule!"

Usefully, respite of a sort is provided in *Wizball*'s bonus rounds, which offer a chance to grab an extra life (if you survive long enough), and the tranquil surroundings of the Wizcave (where you select a permanent power-up and watch Wiz mix the current colour while Nifta gulps down a saucer of milk). But were these strategic elements in any way planned or was it all a happy accident? "All our games were made in the same way: create some great game mechanics, good AI and a decent level structure, and the gameplay looks after itself," claims Hare. "By offering the player a flexible strategy in a structured progression format, it is naturally occurring that the player experiences both freedom and a sense of direction – thus, they can create

> "WIZBALL WAS PUT TOGETHER IN A VERY ORGANIC WAY, AND NOT REALLY PLANNED IN THE WAY MODERN GAMES ARE"
> JON HARE





» Enemies close in as Wiz aims to get enough paint to add the third colour to the final level



» Wiz ponders for a moment his decision to use brown as the base layer for this glass-oriented level

"FOR THE 'GAME OVER' TUNE, WE ALL SIMULTANEOUSLY AGREED THAT AN OUTRAGEOUS 'F*CK YOU!' GUITAR LICK WOULD SUFFICE; IT'S A POKE-IN-THE-EYE, BREAKING THE FICTIONAL MOOD, SINCE YOU'RE PULLED OUT OF YOUR GAME EXPERIENCE" MARTIN GALWAY

their own gameplay and feel it was all some pre-designed strategy!"

Wizball isn't considered a classic just because of its gameplay – it's one of the prettiest games on the C64. But was Wiz always envisaged as a wizard in a grinning green ball? "The ball came first… the wizard was a storyline tagged on near the end," admits Hare. "At Sensi, we'd often create a world and justify it with a dubious storyline!" In hindsight, Hare considers the main character graphics purely functional in design, but remains fond of his work elsewhere: "As an artist, I'm proudest of the backgrounds. My favourite level is the final level, which was the first time I attempted to draw glass on a computer. Mount Rushmore was a 'running out of ideas' moment…"

And then there's sound effects and music, crafted by the talented Martin Galway. Hare notes that "although we gave Martin ideas of what was intended to be conveyed, we just let him get on with it," adding that "I have a feeling Martin played the games as well, which gave him a better feel for the effects!"

Galway remembers becoming involved with the project because Sensi's agreement with Ocean was that they weren't set up to provide music. "Ironic, since Jon and Chris were accomplished musicians capable of working on that aspect of the game," says Galway. "But since Ocean had me in-house and I'd already wowed them with *Parallax*, there was a natural fit."

Freed from the constraints of Ocean's movie and coin-op tie-ins, Galway felt free to experiment, and worked alongside Yates and Hare when some of *Wizball*'s music was composed. "For the simpler tunes, I owe a great deal to the guitar-playing of Chris and Jon. For the 'game over' tune, we agreed that an outrageous 'f*ck you!' guitar lick would suffice. The game itself had a trippy feel to it, which we wanted to continue in the music, but for the game-over tune, we wanted a poke-in-the-eye, breaking the fictional mood, since you're pulled out of your game experience." Yates obliged, picking up his electric guitar and playing a perfect rendition of the tune. "When they came back, I'd recreated his tune inside the C64, making it more massive-sounding than the plain guitar version, and the lads loved it," says Galway.

The bass-line tunes were done in similar fashion, in collaboration with Hare, who provided loops and riffs, but the title-screen music was Galway's. Galway reckons that it's influenced by the Vangelis album *China*, although he's never owned a copy: "I'm not saying I ripped it off – just that I had flavours of that album in my mind as I composed *Wizball*'s title-screen tune. I guess the process was rather like trying to cook a meal you've eaten, but having to guess at the ingredients – it comes out different, but has some similarities."

SID fans will be aware of the shift in tone halfway through the track, which Galway says was down to completing the first part of the tune, doing the rest of the work on the project and then returning to Ocean's Manchester office to quickly completing the title track before becoming embroiled in other games. "I contemplated the mysterious process of creating magic potions that the wizard would go through, and that gave me the basis for the second part of the composition," explains Galway. "The first part evokes the wondrous, magical land that the game takes place in."

Looking back, Galway reckons the music holds up pretty well: "I should have perhaps paid more attention to the end of the title-screen tune, and tried to extend it while keeping the same style. But otherwise I think it's probably the audiovisual pinnacle of my C64 days; there's not much that comes near it."

Despite the unconventional nature of the game, critical acclaim arrived in droves, but this didn't surprise Hare, who considers *Wizball* "one of the most 'complete' games we ever produced". *Commodore User* awarded *Wizball* a Screen Star and only the grumpiness of Gary Penn denied the game a *Zzap!64* Gold Medal. "*Wizball*'s greatest accolade was a 'game of the decade' award from *Zzap!*, which made up for the lack of a Gold Medal, and also ranks as one of my greatest achievements in gaming," says Hare, who considers *Wizball* one of three 'classic' games he's worked on. "The other two are *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder*. I've worked on other great games, but not in the same league!"

SON OF WIZ

Wizball gained a 16-bit-only sequel in the early Nineties – the utterly bonkers *Wizkid*. "The idea of the Wizball gaining a body and walking around was something I'd originally planned for the 8-bit original, but we didn't have enough memory," recalls Hare, who's also adamant that *Wizkid* is a true sequel, rather than a mere spin-off: "The characters are the same – as is the spirit of the game". One major change, however, is the game's inspiration, as Hare explains: "We decided to base the game on *Arkanoid* instead of *Nemesis* and *Defender*, and see what transpired… The crosswords and kittens and stuff just fell out of our heads like unwanted children and ended up in the game. Had we put out *Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll*, I believe that would have been a further sequel, with the same anarchic and humorous spirit found in *Wizball* and *Wizkid*."





» What Mount Rushmore is doing on this alien world is anyone's guess, but Wiz will be splattered all over it if he doesn't deal with the incoming enemies



» Harrowing screams meet you on the game-complete screen, with the colour wrenched from the world again



» After Catelite grabs a light-blue paint drop, the fuzz arrive, dispensing their brand of justice on an unfortunate Wiz



» 'Wot a Wizace!' exclaims the game, treating you to a flypast of each level once all three colours have been applied

STAR WARS

"YOU'RE ALL CLEAR KID"



- » **PUBLISHER** ATARI
- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1000+



HISTORY

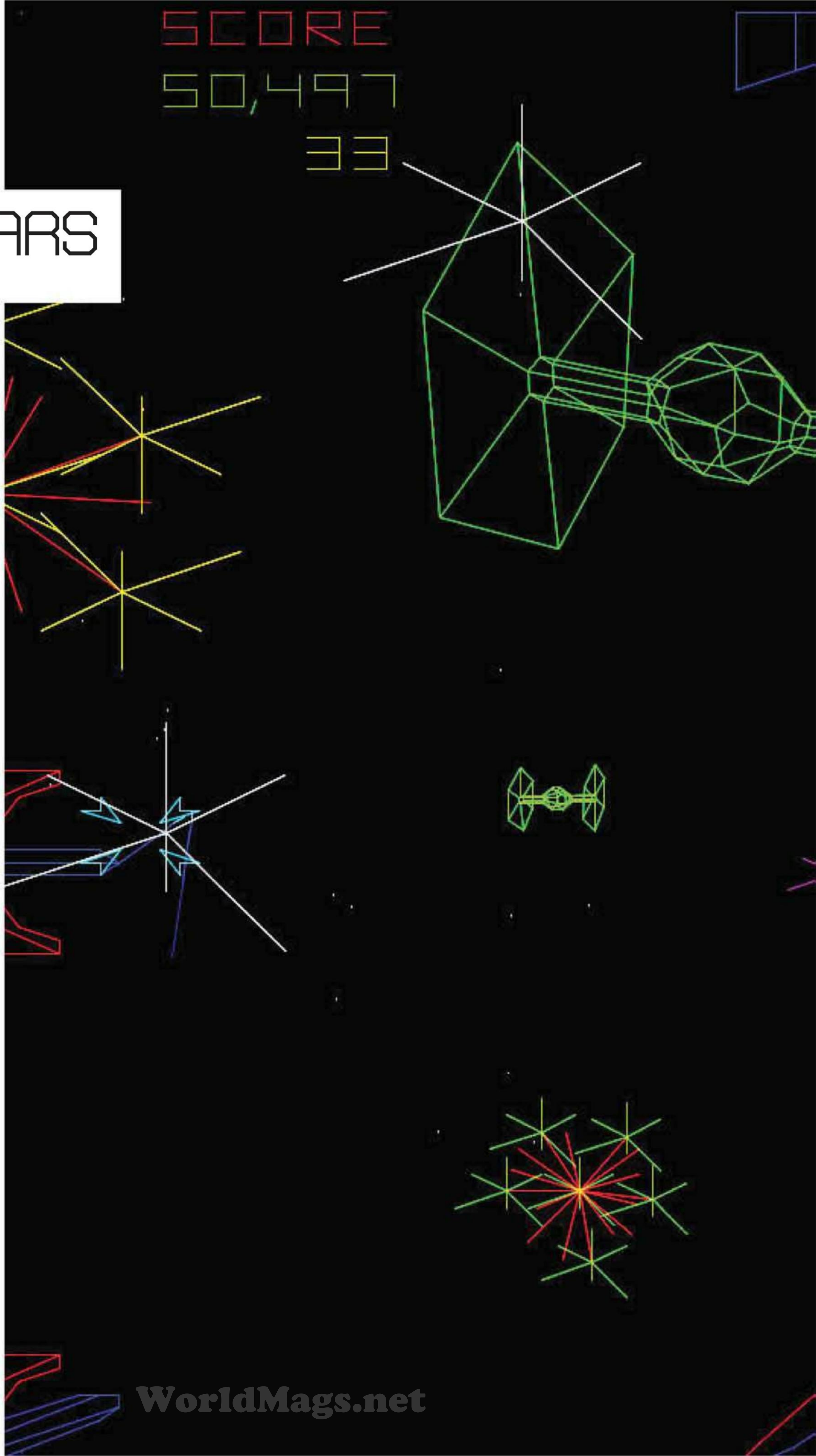
Like many adult males my age I'm a bit of a self-confessed *Star Wars* fan. It's not that I think they're exceptionally well made films – the masterful *Empire Strikes Back* excluded – it's just that they managed to connect with me in a way no other movie has since managed.

Playtime at school would be spent arguing over who got to play Han Solo (it was never me), walks home turned into inevitable re-enactions of key sequences from the trilogy, while my back garden was littered with toys.

Thank God then for the Atari release of *Star Wars* in 1983, as I was given a further output for all my Jedi-fuelled fantasies. Admittedly, this wasn't the first *Star Wars* videogame (that honour goes to the Atari 2600's plodding *The Empire Strikes Back*) but it was the first game to fully capture the joy of the *Star Wars* films, and I lapped it up.

Everything about it was perfect. The sit-down cabinet felt (with a lot of imagination) like you were strapped into your very own X-Wing fighter, the controls were incredibly precise (although you may struggle a little with them nowadays) and the aesthetics were amazing. Tie Fighters roared across the screen, fireballs hurtled towards you at frightening speeds and the dreaded Death Star loomed ever closer. Add in the wide variety of sound effects straight from the film and some of the best 'digitised speech' around and the end result was a truly magical experience that ate up your credits at a truly alarming rate.

What made *Star Wars* so great was the sheer amount of action that was going on. While the aerial dogfights with opposing Tie Fighters were fun, it was the exhilarating race down the Death Star's trench that proved to be the game's real trump card. After reliving the movie so many times in the school playground, the ability to finally participate in the real thing (or as close to it as possible) was a revelation. Thank goodness they had a stand-up cabinet at the Retro Ball…





3
SHIELD
2 WAVE



Manchester was a city in decline, a shadow of its mighty industrial past. But below the city's bustling streets, dozens of programmers huddled together, working on some of videogaming's most recognisable and playable games. So what became of Ocean, one of Europe's biggest ever game developers? David Crookes investigates…



LIFE ON THE

It was one of the largest and most respected games publishers in the world – a company that produced movie tie-ins by the bucketload and converted dozens of top-notch coin-op classics.

Nowadays, Ocean Software is nowhere to be seen, having been swallowed up by French firm Infogrames in the late 1990s.

However, during the height of its dominance the firm was frequently voted "software house of the year", its adverts plastered across almost every single computer magazine across two decades.

"And everyone hated us," says top Spectrum games programmer Jonathan Smith, who was at Ocean for three years from 1984 and was responsible for *Midnight Resistance* and the wrist-numbing *Daley Thompson's Super Test*.

"They were right to hate us. I buzzed off that!"

Ocean was founded by Liverpudlian David Ward, who had already achieved business success with a small chain of boutiques selling ethnic garb, which, in the early 1980s, was quite a trend.

Thinking he could get a good supply of gear from Morocco, fill up a van and bring it back to Britain to flog at a profit, he found himself languishing in a jail in Algerizas. With this in mind, he flew to Morocco for his next trip and did the deals on a more professional level and his clothing plan began to expand. Before long, though, he had spotted another trend, this time while on a trip to America. He saw potential in the fledgling computer games market and realised videogames would one day be a firm part of the entertainment business.

So, on his return to Britain in 1982, he set up Ocean Software as a publishing company. All he needed to do, he surmised, was find a group of talented programmers to produce a range of great games that he could market. By the end of the first year, Ward had five staff, a turnover of £500,000 and had sold 200,000 games. He became chairman, and his partner Jon Woods – who is now a major investor in Everton Football Club – was managing director. The Ocean brand was established as the EA of its day, with around 60 programmers around Britain. Ward said in 1986: "As a publisher we wanted to cast our net as wide as possible so as not to exclude any creative forces."

After a couple of years, Ocean became a developer and snapped up young, emerging talent to work in-house. With an average age of 19, the programmers were loyal and keen. Ocean became based on Central Street in Manchester and there were certainly temptations outside the office, a stone's throw from the nightlife and shops of Deansgate. The programmers hardly saw daylight, though; they were holed up in the building's basement and, to make matters worse, there was an alcohol ban, possibly because it was a former Quakers building – a supposedly haunted one at that.

Artist Brian Flanaghan says: "The building was on a burial ground and there is still a plaque on the Central Street car park explaining the history – and the fact that there are still scores of remains buried there. "And where were we? In the basement! Some people mentioned feelings of 'not being alone' during all-nighters, but I can't say I saw or felt anything supernatural…"

IN BRIEF

Ocean was the Electronic Arts of the Eighties; a big, brash, software house obsessed by film and arcade licences. Set up by Liverpudlian entrepreneur David Ward in Manchester in 1982, it was first a publisher, then a developer. Ocean initially produced a string of terrible games but managed to sell them, generating enough cash to go on to create bigger and better games. Ambitious plans in 1996 to reorganise Ocean in light of the new consoles were scrapped when Infogrames bought the company. Three years later, the brand was no more.









DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

OCEAN WAVES

But why Manchester? "I can't remember why Ocean set up offices in Manchester," says Gary Bracey, former development director at Ocean who started at the firm in 1985. "Both Jon and David were from Liverpool but I think they believed Manchester had a more credible commercial perception than Liverpool, due to the left-wing image it portrayed at the time. Image was certainly important. David and Jon were marketing people first and foremost and built the company on their creativity and drive to succeed. But while it may have been outwardly perceived as a well-oiled, professional organisation, inside, Ocean was a ball of sheer energy, running on the power of the developers' talents and the managers' enthusiasm and beliefs."

The in-house talent at Ocean began to grow substantially but Ocean was also proud of its external resources, which included Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond, Denton Designs, Sensible Software and Digital Image Design, who produced some of the finest flight sims the market had seen. But those early days of games development at Ocean were a real seat-of-the-pants affair, according to Bracey.

He said the games gestated at the whims of the programmers and artists' creative freedom was encouraged, but indulgences had to be reined in due to that ever-present threat of slippage.

Yet many of those early games were hardly ground-breaking, even though they carried big names from *Knight Rider* through *Street Hawk* to *Transformers*.

That's because Ward believed the key to good game sales was to make it recognisable to consumers. This led to scores of film and arcade licences being secured – many of which were absolutely dire. "If you forget that *Knight Rider/Street Hawk* period then Ocean will always be remembered with fondness," laughs Mark Jones (a graphic designer who spent two years at Ocean) recalling the terrible state of those two games.

Jones, starting at Ocean in January 1987, worked on some of the developer's more classic games from *Total Recall*, *Gryzor* and *Wizball* to *Arkanoid*, *Vindicator* and *Rambo III*. By this time, Ocean was establishing its brand and sales were buoyant. Ocean, with a £10 million turnover, was employing 62 staff and had sold 3 million games for a range of computer formats. It had also snapped up Imagine Software – one of the high-profile casualties of a downturn in sales in the mid-Eighties. Imagine, based in Liverpool, had a reputation for producing excellent games for the 8-bit machines with *Renegade* and *Yie Ar Kung Fu* just two of the classics.

In that pursuit of excellence, though, financial control had gone by the wayside, so Imagine – and its international reputation – was cemented with the Ocean brand and became devoted to arcade games, in particular, conversions from Konami coin-op titles such as the aforementioned *Yie Ar Kung Fu* and *Hypersports*.

This meant Ocean was bigger than ever, in both financial and influential terms. Not only was it able to tap into the vast talent at Imagine, its own programmers were starting to knock out some outstanding titles and they were beginning to really enjoy themselves. Jones certainly recalls being impressed by the firm when he went for



» Bill Harbison had a problem drawing the Batmobile. So kapow… he bought the toy!

» Ocean saw the value of its back catalogue and would bundle some of its classic titles together into a compilation

OCEAN'S FREELOAD

Nobody liked loading games from tape and all were grateful to Paul Hughes for creating Ocean's Freeload, which quickened the process and provided protection against piracy. The first Ocean game to use Freeload was *Wizball* on the Commodore 64 in 1987. It replaced a previous tape loader, displaying a picture and, on the C64, playing music as the game loaded.

The loader came complete with an excellent tune, created by Martin Galway, Peter Clarke and Jonathan Dunn. "They were all prolific musicians," Hughes says. "You just asked for a new piece for the loader and they'd oblige."

When Ocean released its budget label, Hit Squad, the games were duplicated by Ablex in Birmingham. A cheap duplication machine was used that couldn't duplicate Freeload at high speed and Hughes had to slow the loader down, which led to Jon Dunn having to write new loading music. "His original tune was too short and ran out before the load finished," Hughes laughs.



an interview in December 1986. "My interview, which I attended with my Mum because I'd never been on a train on my own let alone gone to a different town, was relaxed," he says. "Gary Bracey was very friendly. The general feel of the place was that we all wanted to do our best and produce games that were as good as we could make them."

Ocean rewarded this work by crediting the programmers, artists and musicians on the games themselves and this helped to motivate the staff.

Jones says: "These games were going out with our names on them as well as the Ocean or Imagine name. You wanted them to be good. If not just for the good of the company but for selfish reasons too. If it had 'Mark R. Jones' on it, I didn't want anything to look rubbish."

While the programmers toiled at their keyboards, Bracey and games producer Lorraine Broxton wandered around, taking an active interest in what was going on, what was new and what had been changed.

Other games programmers also took regular screen breaks to see what others were doing.

Jones says: "You couldn't just sit there at your computer screen from 9.30am till 5pm. Sometimes it would get to the stage where you'd been looking at a game for so long, you couldn't tell if it was any good or not. It meant everyone was aware of what everyone else was doing – if you'd produced something bad, there would be no beating about the bush."

Jones's first project was *Wizball*. He had never produced an animated sprite before, so gained help from Simon Butler and Ronnie Fowles, who'd just finished the graphics for *Short Circuit* and were in the late stages of *Arkanoid*, both for the Spectrum.

"They explained to me how to use the in-house Ocean animation program. This was an amended version of Melbourne Draw with animation capabilities," Jones says. However, he's still not happy with the result, despite the game achieving both a *Crash* Smash and *Sinclair User* Classic.

He says: "The programmer of *Wizball* was also new and lots of stuff I'd created was left out. All I see when I look at it is what it could have been. The programmer left the project a month before it was due to be completed and it had to be handed to Paul Owens to finish."

Although Ocean developed many original titles, film licences were king. Videogaming was still in its infancy, although movie merchandising had been prevalent ever since *Star Wars* became a multi-million spin-off industry in 1977. Until Ocean appeared, making the game-of-the-film was still relatively unheard of. Some companies had tried it and been bitten – Atari spent $22 million on *ET: The Extra Terrestrial* only to end up with a terrible game and extremely low sales. Ocean was determined to do it right.

Bracey said: "At first, you could get the licences themselves relatively inexpensively as the movie companies hadn't yet realised the potential income that could be generated, so we snapped them up. Eventually, we were building such a strong track record in terms of sales for licensed games that I started to get flooded with scripts from movie companies actually wanting us to license their titles. That meant key titles like *Batman* weren't that hard to acquire."

One of Ocean's best movie licences was *Robocop* – Bracey's favourite. "The box office was pretty good for this low-budget movie, and we produced a first-rate game based on it. We then went on to sub-license and produce the game on all other formats, including the new NES console system and an actual coin-op machine. The game sold millions of units in all of its entities and it was probably one of the most lucrative titles Ocean ever had – I seem to recall that the licence was not terribly expensive."

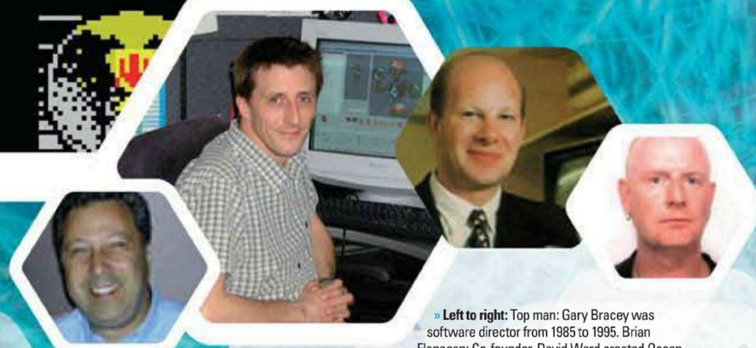
However, inevitably, there were some mistakes. Artist Brian Flanaghan says: "We went after some crazy stuff, like *Michael Jackson's Thriller* for the NES and there was mention of a U2 bid – neither came to fruition. There was also *Radio Flyer*, a licence apparently based around a popular American child's 'pull kart' thing. After reading the script, it turned out the film was about child abuse!



» Sometimes Ocean would work with U.S. Gold and produce compilations with U.S. Gold games including *Indiana Jones* and *Ghostbusters*







» Left to right: Top man: Gary Bracey was software director from 1985 to 1995. Brian Flanagan: Co-founder. David Ward created Ocean and raked in the cash – he is now boss at iFone, which makes games for mobile phones. Graphic genius: Artist ,Simon Butler, worked on loads of Ocean games including *NOMAD, Miami Vice, Total Recall, Navy Seals* and *Addams Family*

Great gaming material there. Obviously the game was axed before anything was programmed."

Of all the games that stick in the mind, Bracey says his biggest error was *Hudson Hawk*. "That was easily the worst licence I acquired," he says cringing at the memory. "The film turned out to be a dreadful, self-indulgent pile of crap and the game was no better. The problem was that the script was one of the best I had ever read. Unfortunately, what ended up on the screen was a far cry from the script I had been given. Thanks Mr Willis!"

Yet Ocean came in for widespread criticism for its film licences, with many branding them formulaic platformers. The company always contested that it was what people wanted and the games certainly continued to top the charts – Bracey notes that during his nine years at the company, Ocean generated more than 100 chart number ones.

Although Bracey has admitted the majority of games weren't anything special, he puts that down to the sheer quantity of titles Ocean produced, yet firmly believes there were many gems that hit the mark – not least *Batman*, which had many sub-games; *Robocop 3*, enhanced by its driving and shoot-'em-up sections; *Addams Family*, a massive platform game and *Hook*, a true adventure game. However, he points to the solid hits *F-29, Battle Command, Push Over, Sleep Walker* and *Wizkid*, as notable, original 16-bit games.

Nevertheless, film licences were the most important and the need to get them out at around the same time as the movie put a lot of pressure on Ocean's staff, who were often given very strict deadlines.

This would mean some heavy stints for the programmers and it was not unknown for some of them to work a shift far in excess of 24 hours to get the game finished and down to the duplicators.

Any laughter that would usually emanate from the basement would quieten during these tense periods of time. Programmer Paul Hughes said: "The in-house crew had some absolutely incredible talent that didn't blink at the thought of working 72 hours straight and then driving to the duplicators with the master."

However, despite their hard work, the programmers were always last to find out about the new movie tie-ups and so would engage in a little skulduggery. Jones says: "The first we would hear about the latest deals was when film companies would send scripts, photo stills and promotional material.

"It would always do us good to have a discrete nose round Gary Bracey's desk when he wasn't there – I can say that now, I'm sure he knows – everyone did it!"

Arcade licences were equally important to Ocean. Between 1983 and 1992, half of all the games Ocean released were based on coin-ops or films. And they threw up their own problems, mainly for the programming staff. Ocean's bosses would approach their programmers with the latest state-of-the-art, all-singing, all-dancing arcade machine – telling them their next project was to convert it to the humble Spectrum, C64 or Amstrad.

As Simon Butler recalls, "It was a challenge, but also a major pain."

Many of Butler's games were coin-op conversions or film licences. He worked on titles spanning almost all of Ocean's lifespan from *The Neverending Story, Platoon* and *Combat School* to *Total Recall, Darkman* and the *Addams Family* – and all had to be faithful to the film or arcade, which was a difficult task.

It was a challenge also faced by graphic designer Bill Harbison, who joined Ocean in March 1988.

"I was proud of my coin-op conversion of *Chase HQ*," he says. "We had the arcade machine of *Chase HQ* so I could copy the graphics, although we didn't have the technology to strip the graphics from the arcade board, so I had to play the game with one hand and have a pencil in the other to make reference sketches. *Batman* was easier, the only difficulty being I had very little reference material to draw the Batmobile convincingly in 3D and couldn't get it right – even with a week to go to completion. Luckily some *Batman* toys were available. I bought myself a small Batmobile and used it to draw the finished sprites."

OCEAN AND AMSTRAD

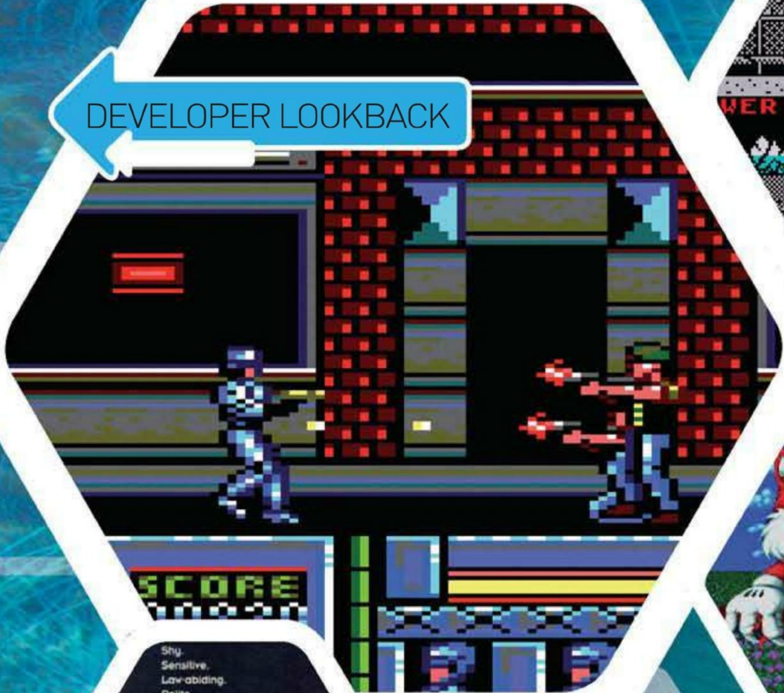
When Amstrad decided to produce its ill-fated GX4000 console, it knew it needed some big names to back it up. And at the time – 1990 – Ocean was the top software house and the two companies soon came to a deal, along with Gremlin, Titus, Loricel, and Domark.

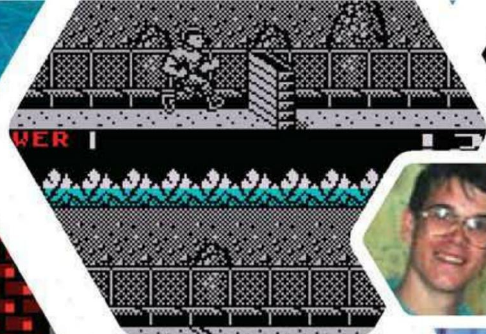
Amstrad gave the companies free rein to create any game they wanted, the only stipulation was that the packaging had to follow a pre-set format. Ocean then knocked out a series of games, although, sadly, many were straight ports of existing CPC titles, only sold at vastly inflated prices.

But then, money was the important thing. Sir Alan Sugar said as much at the launch. "We don't just see this as Amstrad fighting Nintendo and Sega," he said, talking about the battle for console dominance. "We see this as Amstrad, together with companies such as Ocean and others who want to make some money and who do not want to be dictated to, fighting against these people."

Ocean's *Burnin Rubber* game was created specially for the GX4000 and was bundled with the machine.

Ocean also created games for another 8-bit inspired console, the Commodore 64GS. Unfortunately, that too ultimately failed.

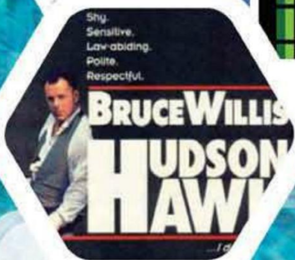






» The C64's *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge* gets a familiar face – Ocean graphic designer Mark Jones





» *Hudson Hawk;* Great film, believable characters, interesting plot, worth watching, good game potential… Gary Bracey thought so – and later regretted it



OF ALL THE GAMES WHICH STICK IN THE MIND, BRACEY SAYS HIS BIGGEST ERROR WAS HUDSON HAWK. "THAT WAS EASILY THE WORST LICENCE I ACQUIRED, THE FILM WAS A PILE OF CRAP"

MAGAZINES

"Everyone hated us," says Jonathan Smith - but was that the case? Certainly, the top computer magazines of the 1980s and early 1990s thrived off Ocean – if only because of its advertising.

Gary Bracey says: "Obviously, we spent a small fortune advertising in magazines and so they were wary of upsetting us too much. But in general, if one of our games sucked then they said so and were equally enthusiastic if the title warranted it."

Mark Jones agreed: "From my experience the magazines loved Ocean. They were always nice and friendly when they came round. Every now and again you'd get a mag come in and do the rounds, having a look at what was in development. They'd sit down and you'd talk them through what you were doing, what stage the game was at and what was to be done. Ocean were always given good write-ups when the magazines were previewing games. We'd do what we could for the magazines, providing screenshots and sometimes demos for them to take away."

There were some problems, however. Bracey says: "There were one or two journalists who just hated Ocean and we knew that they would always give us a poor score no matter what the game genuinely deserved."

While developing a game, staff would wear many hats including those of storyboard artist, producer, character designer, game designer, and copywriter. Butler says: "We got involved in many parts of the game and we cared for them. It rankled when we were pipped to the number one slot in the charts or when we missed out on a plum licence or franchise."

Much of that was because Ocean's greatest rival, U.S. Gold, was breathing down their necks, even though Ward and Woods had a large stake in the company. From time to time, the two companies worked together, particularly on compilations, bringing together the best of both firms in treats such as *They Sold A Million,* including Ocean's *Daley Thompson's Decathalon* and U.S. Gold's *Beach Head.* In every other respect, though, the pair were at war. When they became concerned there were budget houses flogging software for £1.99 as opposed to full price, they each set up rival low-price labels, U.S. Gold forming Kixx and Ocean creating The Hit Squad, to sell old games first at £2.99, later at £3.99.

Bracey said: "There really was serious rivalry between Ocean and U.S. Gold. We wanted to be the best and wouldn't rest on our laurels. But as time passed and we entered the console era then I think our main competitors became companies like Acclaim – though the competition and desire to be the best remained."

Competition extended inwards too. Butler says: "There was a sense of camaraderie at Ocean but also a healthy sense of competition between the various teams; to top the animation, to better the graphics or, in the coder's field, to have more sprites, bigger sprites – for your code to be better or faster."

"But it got harder with the 16-bits," adds Jones. "Instead of a few hours putting pixels in the right place to make a character die convincingly on the 8-bits, you spent double the time making sure the shading was correct or light was coming in from the same place."

As time went by, Ocean adapted to the changing market conditions. Games switched from being programmed by a few to being tackled by masses and the threat of the big American and Japanese companies was brushed aside, with Bracey saying Ocean was excited and not scared by the challenge.

Ocean had spent a couple of years in the early Nineties worrying about how the industry was going to develop. However, around 1994, it set up a new in-house development team, Tribe, and head of software development Ian Turnbull decided a professional, structured way of working was needed if Ocean was to make the massive jump from 8/16-bit to 32/64-bit.

Separate teams were created, each having a team leader, lead programmer and designer. Games were developed off-screen six months before any coding began and by 1996 there were 80 Tribe staff members. In that same year, though, French firm Infogrames came sniffing and snapped up Ocean. It retained the Manchester office for development until Infogrames bought Gremlin in 1999 and programming was moved to Sheffield. Not long after, the Ocean brand was dropped. *GT 64 Championship Edition* for the Nintendo 64 was the last game by Ocean in 1998.

Flanagan said: "The initial feeling when Infogrames took over was good. We had a new shiny building and this strange French megacorp was going to put lots of money into the company. But then certain games weren't released. I was working on *The Shadow* for the SNES and Mega Drive and had designed the sprites and a large proportion of the backgrounds. I also designed the game and was the lead artist but, sadly, the game was never released as the film bombed massively."

Many of the old Ocean guys – and gals – have not gone away completely, however. As well as most being involved in the industry in some way, they also chat on the forums at – www.theoceanexperience.co.uk.

Jones added: "It's sad in a way that the Ocean name has gone but good in another. I guess it means it will always remind misty eyed 30-something gamers of a time when games didn't have to rely on fancy FMVs and flashy graphics in order to impress."





SOFTOGRAPHY

1983
Royal Birkdale: Championship Golf (Spectrum)
Digger Dan (Spectrum)
Island Of Death (Oric)
Armageddon (Spectrum)
Rescue (Spectrum)
Pogo (Spectrum)
Android 2 (Spectrum, C64)
Rollerball (C64)

1984
Gift From the Gods (Spectrum)
Gilligan's Gold (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Robotics (Spectrum)
Eskimo Eddie (Spectrum, C64)
Hunchback (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Bruce Lee (Spectrum)
Mr. Wimpy (Spectrum, C64)
High Noon (Spectrum, C64)
Cavelon (Spectrum, C64)
Moon Alert (Spectrum)
Daley Thompson's Decathlon (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Chinese Juggler, The (Spectrum, C64)
Kong (Spectrum, C64)
Transversion (Spectrum)
Bangers and Mash (C64)
Spellbound (C64)

1985
Hunchback 2: Quasimodo's Revenge (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Kong 2: Kong Strikes Back (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Match Day (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Neverending Story, The (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Daley Thompson's Supertest (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Pud Pud in Weird World (Spectrum)
Rambo (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Frankie Goes To Hollywood (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Tornado Low Level (Spectrum, C64)
Roland's Rat Race (Spectrum, C64)
A Fi$tful of Buck$ (C64)
Cosmic Wartoad (Spectrum)
V (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)

1986
Platoon (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Street Hawk (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
N.O.M.A.D. (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Nightmare Rally (Spectrum)
Donkey Kong (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Superbowl (Spectrum)
Great Escape, The (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Gryzor (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Nexus (Spectrum)
Miami Vice (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Helikopter Jagd (C64)
Highlander (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Transformers (Spectrum, C64)
Hunchback II (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Hunchback – The Adventure (Spectrum, C64)
Cobra (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Mailstrom (Spectrum)
Laser Sprite Generator (Spectrum)
It's A Knockout (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Knight Rider (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Batman (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Army Moves (Spectrum)
Parallax (Spectrum, C64)

1987
Wizball (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Short Circuit (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
International Match Day (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Mario Bros (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Starace (C64)
Match Day 2 (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Slap Fight (Spectrum)
Flashpoint (Spectrum)
Top Gun (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Double Take (Spectrum, C64)
Mutants (Spectrum, C64)
Tank (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Tai-Pan (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Head Over Heels (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Road Race (Spectrum)
Super Bowl XX (Spectrum, C64)
Combat School (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Eco (Amiga, Atari ST)

1988
Gutz (Spectrum, C64)
Typhoon (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Cabal (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Emilio Butraguemo 1 (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Operation Wolf (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amstrad GX4000, Amiga, Atari ST)
Rambo 3 (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Phantom Club (Spectrum, Amstrad)
Firefly (Spectrum, C64)
W.E.C. Le Mans (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Batman – The Caped Crusader (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Psycho Soldier (Spectrum)
Track & Field (Spectrum)
Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Madballs (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Moonshadow (C64)
Where Time Stood Still (Spectrum)

1989
Red Heat (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Chase HQ (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Operation Thunderbolt (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Robocop (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, GameBoy)
Run the Gauntlet (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Beach Volley (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Batman – The Movie (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
New Zealand Story, The (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Untouchables, The (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, NES, MSX)
Emilio Butraguemo 2 (Spectrum)
F29 - Retaliator (Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Voyager (Amiga)

1990
Shadow Warriors (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Robocop 2 (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad GX4000, Amiga, Atari ST, GameBoy)
Rainbow Islands: Bubble Bobble 2 (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, GameBoy)
Midnight Resistance (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Puzznic (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Sly Spy: Secret Agent (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Chase HQ 2: Special Criminal Investigations (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad GX4000, Amiga, Atari ST)
Narc (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Plotting (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Pang (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad GX4000, Amiga, Atari ST)
Night Breed (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Adidas Championship Football (Spectrum, C64)
Adidas Championship Tie-Break (Spectrum)
Lost Patrol (Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Ivanhoe (Amiga)
Shadow Of The Beast (C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Burnin Rubber (GX4000)

1991
Toki (Spectrum, C64, Amiga, Atari ST)
Navy Seals (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, GameBoy)
Double Dragon (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Total Recall (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Battle Command (Spectrum, C64, Amiga, Atari ST)
Smash TV (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Simpsons: Bart Vs The Space Mutants (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Hudson Hawk (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Darkman (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, NES, Game Boy)
Terminator 2: Judgement Day (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
WWF WrestleMania (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Addams Family, The (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, SNES, Game Boy)
Elf (Amiga, Atari ST, PC)

1992
WWF European Rampage Tour (C64, Amiga, Atari ST)
Cool World (C64, Amiga, Atari ST, NES, Game Boy)
Robocop 3 (Spectrum, C64, Amiga, Atari ST, NES)
Spacegun (Spectrum, C64, Amiga, Atari ST)
Epic (Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Hook (C64, Amiga, Atari ST, SNES, NES, Mega Drive, Game Boy, Game Gear)
Lethal Weapon (Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, SNES, NES, Game Boy)
Parasol Stars: Rainbow Islands II (Amiga, Atari ST, PC, Game Boy)
Pushover (Amiga, Atari ST, PC, SNES)
Sleepwalker (C64, Amiga, Atari ST)
Wizkid (Amiga, Atari ST)

1993
Dennis The Menace (Amiga, Amiga CD32, SNES, Game Boy)
Jurassic Park (Amiga, NES, Mega Drive, Sega Master System, Game Boy, Game Gear)
Ryder Cup Golf (Amiga)
Shut-It (PC)
Retee 2 (Amiga)

1994
Inferno (PC)
Eek The Cat (SNES)
Jungle Strike (Amiga, Amiga CD32)
Kid Chaos (Amiga)

1995
The Raiden Project
Mr Nutz (Amiga, Sega Mega Drive, SNES, Game Boy)

1996
Break Point (PlayStation)
Cheesy (PlayStation)
Tunnel B1 (PlayStation, Sega Saturn)
World Rally Fever (PC)
X2 (PlayStation)
Zero Divide (PlayStation)

1997
(I-War) (PC)
Jersey Device (PlayStation)
Total Drivin (PlayStation)
Multi-Racing Championship (N64)

1998
Fighters Destiny (N64)
Mission: Impossible (N64)
Wetrix (N64, PC)
Viper (PlayStation)
Zero Divide 2 (PlayStation)
GT 64 Championship Edition (N64)

Timeline

With literally hundreds of games to its name, finding an Ocean game is easy. However, there were certainly some notable ones – for reasons both good and bad…

1985-6



THE NEVERENDING STORY [1985]

Systems, Spectrum, Commodore, Amstrad

This early solid, three-part text adventure was based on the popular film and book and featured great graphics from Simon Butler. However, looking back, it had quite limiting gameplay and suffers from a lack of character interaction. Objects cannot be examined and the parser is limited making your role as Atreyu and your task of saving the land of Fantasia from the Nothing that is destroying it, quite hard work.



RAMBO [1985]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad

Rambo cashed in on the infamous Sylvester Stallone movie but lacked the nationalism and gore that made it controversial. Poor graphics and a muggy control system caused it to be an over-hyped mess and nothing more than a sub-standard, relentless blast-'em-up using knives, bow and arrows, machine guns, grenades and rocket launchers. The enemies fired at you no matter your position, so you had to keep moving – flicking the off switch was more satisfying.



KNIGHT RIDER [1986]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad

The Eighties television series was good, but this game was one of the worst ever made. Fans had waited for over a year to play the pixellated forms of Michael Knight and his amazing talking car KITT and to say they were disappointed was an understatement. Driving the car should have been a joy – instead it was dull and hard to control, no matter whether you decided to handle the car yourself or let the computer take over to leave you to shoot enemy helicopters. A terrible mistake.



STREET HAWK [1986]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad

Another TV licence and another lengthy wait for fans to see this title on the shelf led to further pulling of hair in sheer frustration at the utterly dire game that resulted. The top-down view on a downward rolling road was impressively flicker free but it was marred by poor controls and turgid gameplay that was not even lit up by the imaginative methods employed by the baddies, such as emerging from manholes.



GRYZOR [1986]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad

Mark Jones's graphics shone bright from this 8-bit game, from the beautiful loading screen to the in-game scenes. And what a game it was. Jones and programmer John Brandwood had been behind the ravishing *Renegade* and here they were again with a very enjoyable challenge; a shoot-'em-up with strategy as you varied the angle of your shooting in what proved to be a faithful and fun arcade conversion.

1987



HEAD OVER HEELS

[1987] Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

John Ritman and Bernie Drummond – fresh from producing the dazzling 3D action adventure *Batman* – created this classic game that became a jewel in Ocean's crown. Perhaps ironically so, since it had Head and Heels trying to steal crowns from the five worlds of the Blacktooth Empire.



TAI-PAN [1987]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad

Similar to an *Elite* of the high seas, this game fell far short of that classic. A trading game set on the China seas in the 1840s, this was based on James Clavell's book of the same name. Terrible graphics turned many people off but there were some nice touches as you got a loan, grabbed a crew and began trading. Yet gameplay was spoiled by the disastrous amount of time it took to load the town and sailing sections during play.



WIZBALL [1987]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

A classic, amazing game! *Wizball* caught the imagination and left goose pimples all over. You just wanted to help Wizball restore some colour to Wizworld after the wizard Zark had left it grey because you were drawn into this original concept, flick-screen, tube and crater extravaganza.



MATCH DAY II [1987]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad

Ritman and Drummond teamed up again on this follow up to the brilliant *Match Day* and kept all that was good about that first game and added the revolutionary "kickometer" for you to judge how hard you kicked the ball. There was an overhaul of the graphics but the great arcade action set this apart.

1988



TARGET RENEGADE [1988]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad

A game from Ocean's respected purchase, Imagine Software, *Target Renegade* was almost identical to *Renegade* with its rather seedy streets and run-down urban settings but, considering the original was superb, it's no surprise that it was used for inspiration.



OPERATION WOLF [1988]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

As arcade conversions go, this was a belter, a real leave-your-brains-in-the-school-cupboard game that your teachers would have poured scorn upon. Its aim was simple; five hostages are trapped in a jungle concentration camp – you must rescue them.



BATMAN: THE CAPED CRUSADER [1988]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

With a movie a year away, Ocean was ahead of itself with this DC comic tie-in featuring both The Joker and the Penguin. Pages of strict rules and regulations were agreed and the game went back and forth between DC and Ocean. In the end, it was a corker.



CABAL [1988]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

Programmed by James Bagley, this shooter was lacking visually and there was trouble with the crosshairs and the movement of soldiers, both being far from fluid. Yet despite that, *Cabal* was a solid attempt to replicate the 3D perspective of the original.

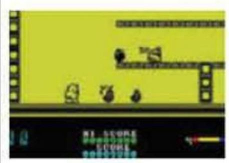
1989



ROBOCOP [1989]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, Game Boy

Ocean achieved great success with this one, having picked up the licence relatively cheaply and then porting to almost every format imaginable. Even the Amstrad GX4000 got an admittedly lush-looking version. Standard Ocean platform fare it may have been, but as you took to the streets and raided a drugs factory there was enough to keep you interested. "Serve the public trust, protect the innocent, uphold the law." Indeed. And the music was from that Ariston advert.



THE NEW ZEALAND STORY [1989]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

A *Taito* coin-op conversion done with some justice on the 8-bits but falling short of expectations. Fluffy cuteness abounds in this tale about an evil walrus stealing some kiwis. You play the kiwi the walrus missed, complete with a bow and arrow and bent on revenge. Quite nasty for such an airy looking game that was faithful to the arcade game but wasn't all that fun to play.



BATMAN: THE MOVIE [1989]

ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad, Commodore Amiga, Atari ST, PC

This was the third *Batman* game to be released by Ocean, this time based on the movie. Split into five levels, it had something to please everyone, from the standard platform levels, through puzzle levels, to finally climbing atop Gotham City Cathedral to dispatch the Joker.



OPERATION THUNDERBOLT [1989]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amstrad GX4000, Amiga, Atari ST

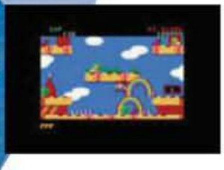
The Commodore 64 version of this *Operation Wolf* sequel was a mess. Created by a junior coder, the game was only around half complete when it was handed to Paul Hughes, Johhny Meegan and Rick Palmer. They were given the task to rewrite it from scratch in just 12 days!



CHASE HQ [1989]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

"Let's go, Mr Driver". Those immortal words have gone down in videogaming lore and Ocean did a great job in converting this coin-op to the home micros, perfectly replicating the ultra-fast sports cars in which you pursued some pretty nifty criminals. Addictive, good looking and a well-chosen and implemented conversion.



RAINBOW ISLANDS [1990]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

There was a problem with *Rainbow Islands* on some formats – how do you replicate colourful rainbows on a Spectrum? That aside, though, Ocean did well in translating Bub and Bob's exploring antics across seven islands, using rainbows to kill monsters and also to climb on. Magazines raved over this one, marvelling over the cute graphics and neat gameplay and it was a feather in the Mancunian outfit's cap.



MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE [1990]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

Although slow, this game was a typical Ocean platform-shooter, but was nevertheless very playable. Programmer Jonathan Smith pulled the sprite graphics from the arcade ROMs and said it was easy to convert them to home machines. The result was the player guiding a large sprite of a hero through side-scrolling screens and shooting at anything in sight, using weapons that could spit lead through 360 degrees.



NIGHTBREED [1990]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

In this game of the book and film by Clive Barker, you were thrown into the world of Midian where grotesque monsters roamed and where you, as Aaron Boone, wreaked vengeance on the psychiatrist who had used hypnosis to make you believe you were a murderer. Disappointingly, given a meaty story, this was just a collect-'em-up with a bit of violence. Worse, it was very samey and easy to complete.



PUZZNIC [1990]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

With Ocean's myriad platform shooters, it was refreshing to see *Puzznic* among its catalogue. Quite simply, this was a game to think about, teasing your brain over dozens of levels and proving to be a real challenge. You basically matched tiles with the same pattern and watched them disappear. It wasn't as easy as it sounds, though, and it remains one of the best – if not the most well known – puzzlers to have graced a computer.



PANG [1990]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad GX4000, Amiga, Atari ST

Following *Puzznic*, gamers who like to think a little as they play were treated yet again and this arcade conversion couldn't really be bettered. It was easy to pick up and the graphics were superb; a thumping soundtrack added to the excitement. The puzzle and action element of the game, coupled with lots of locations and a perfect difficulty curve made it an essential purchase. Bursting balloons took on a whole new level of excitement.



TOTAL RECALL [1991]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

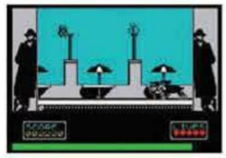
Drawing on the popular Arnold Schwarzenegger film, this game ended up being released to coincide with the video, but was worth the wait. Yes, it followed a rather tired formula – another foray into running, fighting and jumping, another driving section, a boss to bash – but it was polished and exciting enough to make it one of the best licences ever and had lush sprites and brilliant backgrounds.



SMASH TV [1991]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

Smash TV was a conversion of the Williams coin-op which was, in turn, an updated version of the arcade hit *Robotron 2084*. The coin-op had four joysticks and action so speedy a tranquilliser was needed before you started to play. Yet, although the home versions didn't have an array of joysticks, the speed did, thankfully, remain. The colourful graphics drew you in and the exhilarating gameplay kept you hooked.



HUDSON HAWK [1991]

Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST

Gary Bracey called it the worst licence he had ever acquired and said the platform game based upon it was no better than Bruce Willis's dire movie. Yet it achieved a *Crash* Smash and *Amstrad Action* gave it 94 %. At last – a game better than the movie! It looked smart, had depth and was actually a lot of fun, and the short sub-levels added variety. There was even a ventilation shaft bit!



THE ADDAMS FAMILY [1991]

Spectrum, Commodore64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, SNES, Game Boy

Amiga Power adored this game, created by James Higgins, Warran Lancashire and Simon Butler – and many at Ocean believed it was the best thing they had ever created. It was certainly a fast and furious *Sonic*-style platformer that shone on the SNES and worked well on the Amiga. However, it also translated well onto the 8-bits and achieved deserved rave reviews.



SPACE GUN [1992]

Spectrum, C64, Amiga, Atari ST

This *Taito* coin-op conversion was created by Images Software and was similar to *Operation Thunderbolt*, only set in space. But by the time this was released, straight arcades conversions were becoming less of an Ocean hallmark and didn't show the innovation that other products at the time were. The two-player violence fest was enjoyable, however, and there were enough alien nasties to blow away to make it a decent purchase.



JURASSIC PARK [1993]

Amiga, NES, Mega Drive, Master System, Game Boy, GameGear

Ocean released three very distinct *Jurassic Park* games: an isometric action adventure for the NES and Game Boy, an isometic title with first-person perspective play for the SNES and an isometric/first-person game that had improved resolution and artwork for the PC and Amiga. Now the firm understood there were distinct consumer trends as opposed to the catch-all 8-bit and 16-bit markets. Each game did the licence full justice.

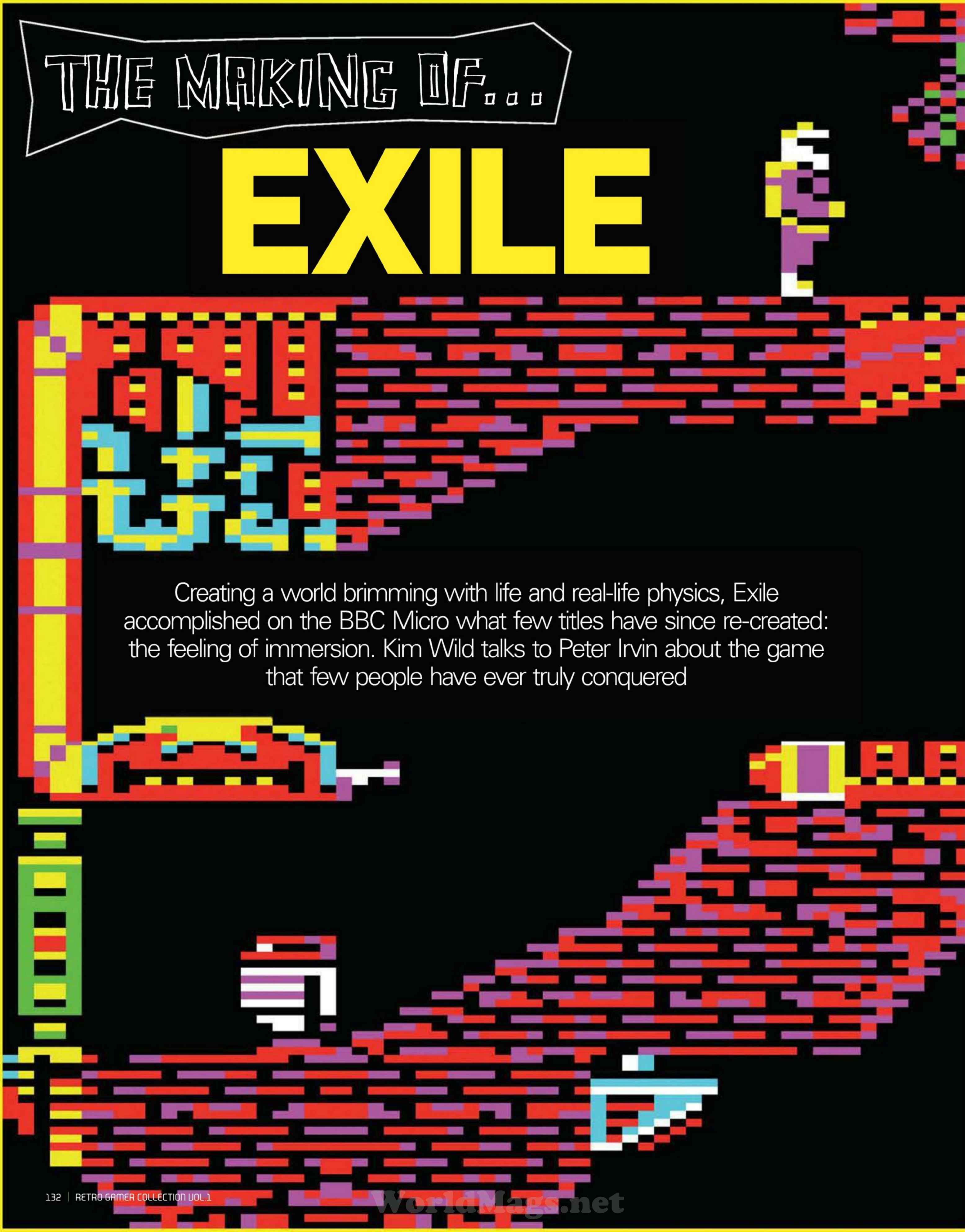


MR NUTZ [1994]

Amiga, Mega Drive, SNES, Game Boy

Ocean went all cutesy and designed a furry mascot to plonk into a new platform game. It could have been lazy – something that looked highly polished for the kids – but while it did look stunning, the level design stood the game head and shoulders above most other platformers and created a very enjoyable title. Rusty controls marred an otherwise fluid game but that's just nit picking over a solid, playable title.

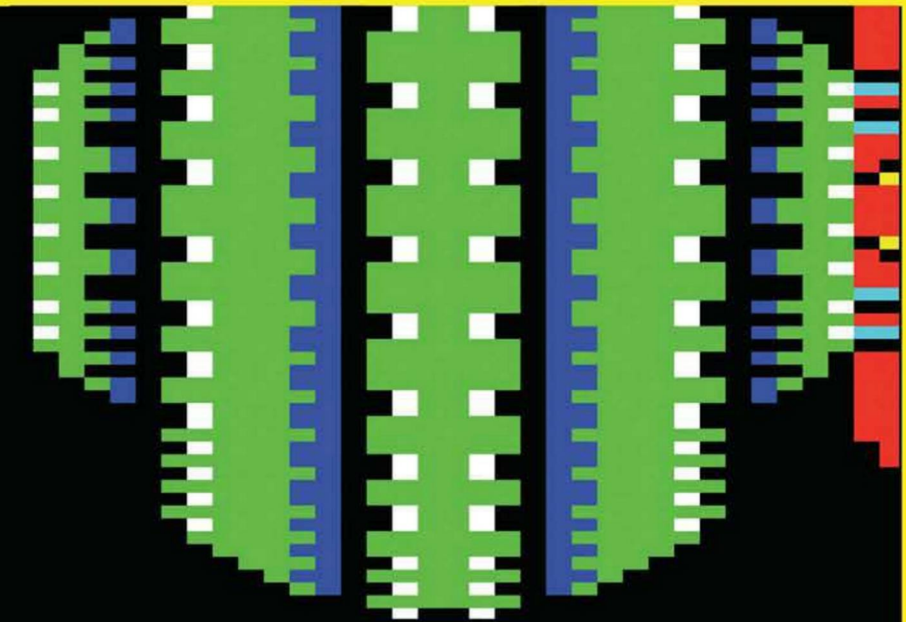
1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992-4

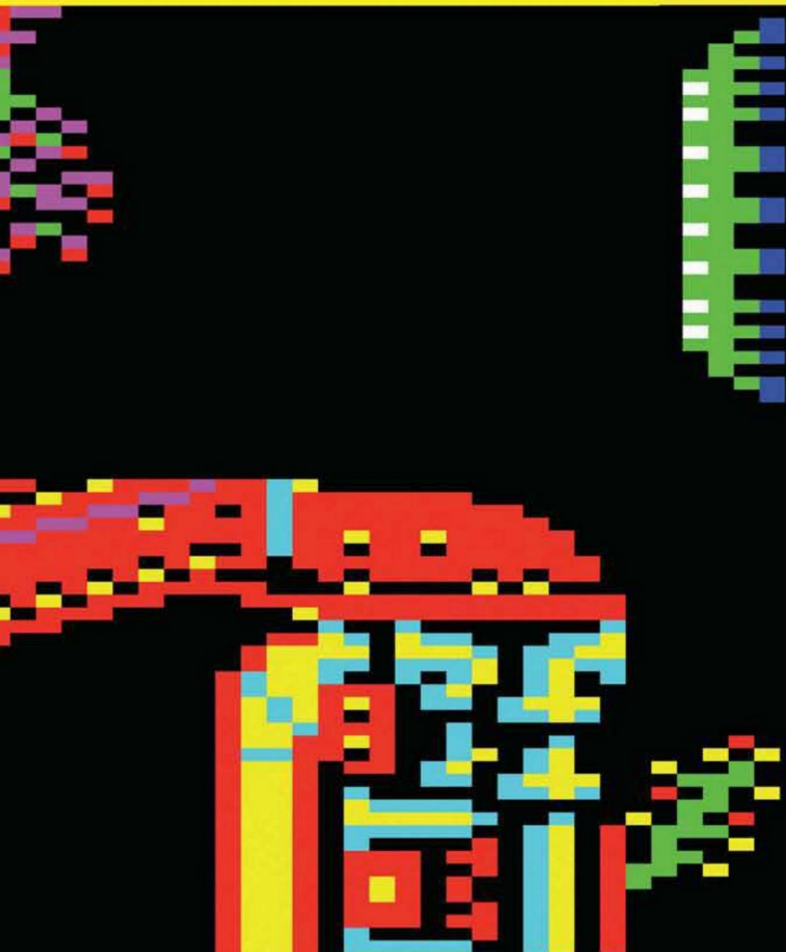


THE MAKING OF...

EXILE

Creating a world brimming with life and real-life physics, Exile accomplished on the BBC Micro what few titles have since re-created: the feeling of immersion. Kim Wild talks to Peter Irvin about the game that few people have ever truly conquered





"There are some individuals whose actions mark them as unfit to live within a civilised society.

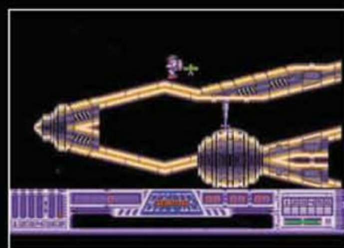
Your crimes have been of a horrifyingly barbaric nature and throughout this trial you have failed to exhibit even the slightest vestige of remorse. Although it gives us no pleasure to pass such a sentence, we must act to protect the innocent. We decree that your presence within this society can no longer be tolerated."

You are Mike Finn, a space hero sent to the surface of planet Phoebus after receiving distress calls from another mission. Upon arrival, Triax (a deranged scientist exiled due to his crimes against humanity) steals the destinator from the ship, leaving you stranded along with any possible survivors. Within moments of exploring the land, you encounter a green bird, harmless but irritating as it dives into you repeatedly. Discovering a grenade, you take it, storing it for future use. A harsh particle wind to the east prevents you from moving so back you go and downwards into the next passage. Once there, a turret gun fires, following your movement and you dive down to safety. A closed door waits, so dropping the grenade, you move away as the explosion destroys the metal structure. More passages and caverns are begging to be explored. Welcome to *Exile*.

ONE GIANT STEP FOR MIKE FINN

Peter Irvin and Jeremy Smith met at school and became friends, both owning a BBC Micro. Of the two, Smith was the first to get a game commercially published – *Space Pirates* – and would later release the classic inertia space title *Thrust* for the format, with Irvin becoming known for his eight-way shoot-'em-up *Starship Command*. Smith went to Imperial College while Irvin attended Cambridge University and it was after finishing their respective courses there that the duo decided to team up and create a game. "I started a sideways-scrolling game that had a wizard exploring a cave – which looked great – but with all the things I had intended to put in it, I ran out of memory and realised I had to devise a much more efficient way to create and populate the game world. The basis for *Exile,* as a man flying around a 2D environment with guns and physics, started with that, though, of course, Jeremy was also playing with similar concepts for his *Gravitar* game. The timing was such that I had to decide what to do after university and, coincidentally, Jeremy was thinking the same – we decided to team up to create *Exile*, so I shelved the wizard game and adapted the code to do a huge 2D world map. When we started we were just building the technology to see how far we could get with the limited resources available on the BBC Micro before gradually defining what the game would be like."

Very early on, the limitations of the BBC Micro made themselves apparent,



» The Amiga 500/600 version boasted enhanced visuals and featured scrolling messages at the bottom of the screen



» Oliver Pike managed to complete the BBC Micro version and was issued a certificate from publisher Superior Software

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** SUPERIOR INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:** JEREMY C SMITH/ PETER J M IRVIN
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** SIMULATION GAME
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

STARSHIP COMMAND
SYSTEMS: BBC MICRO
YEAR: 1983

FRONTIER: ELITE II
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1993

DARXIDE
SYSTEMS: SEGA 32
YEAR: 1996

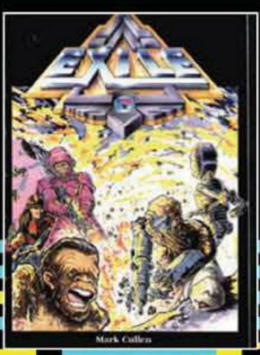


"IT SURPRISES ME EVEN NOW THAT EXILE COULD EXIST IN SUCH A SMALL RAM FOOTPRINT" PETER IRVIN

A TALE FROM OUTER SPACE

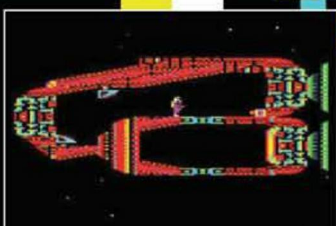
Extracts from the *Exile* novella: "Once a planet was located, an initial unmanned probe (known colloquially as a dwarfie) would establish whether there was any possibility of it supporting human life. If this proved favourable, a manned probe would follow to explore the new discovery in more detail. These were the Columbus Probes. One such follow-up craft was the 'Pericles'. When a dwarfie returned favourable data from a large planet, the 'Pericles' was launched on the long journey to the new world, named Phoebus. Its mission: to investigate and to report. Sprake led a party out to begin their preliminary exploration. Professor Spiegel refused to come. He had taken an irrational dislike to the planet, based on the fact that the dwarfie hadn't registered the winds and what he called 'intuition… a feeling that we will have trouble here'."

For the full version, visit **www.inventivity.co.uk**.





» This comes from the Amiga 1200, with a distinctly different graphical style and extra areas



» The start of the adventure. What you can't see is the stars changing colour, twinkling in space

with *Exile* having to be programmed around the meagre 32K RAM, a technical achievement that still impresses its co-creator. "It surprises me even now that *Exile* could exist in such a small RAM footprint. *Exile* is to a large extent an academic exercise in writing compact code and data structures. The biggest drawback was the version control – there wasn't any then. We had to write down on bits of paper which functions we'd had to alter, and in which of the 15 or so modules it was in, and then when it came to merging our separate changes it was a long session of careful cut and paste." There were several elements that had the power been available, Irvin would have loved to have included. "One thing we wanted to have was smoother terrain (which was done on the later 16-bit versions) and modifiable terrain (eg, blowing holes in the rock)."

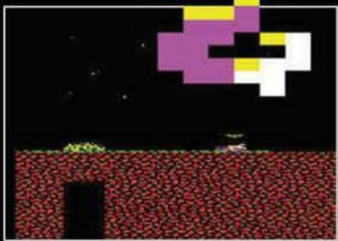
Despite being a space based game, *Exile* is a collage of vibrant colours, giving life to a world inhabited by seemingly intelligent creatures. Although other formats would revamp the game's look, there is something magical about the colourful style that remains impressive today. Yet while many games have artists to craft the worlds within, *Exile*'s environment was entirely down to programming. "Jeremy and I did them all – there was no budget to pay for artists, and the way the graphics were implemented (the size of each graphic defined the collision box, and thus affected various puzzles) meant that it would have been very time consuming to specify what each sprite should be," explains Irvin. "The overall design was limited by the programming, which is kind of opposite to what happens in games today. The graphics are as reduced and limited as possible so that the RAM use is a minimal." *Exile* was also one of the first BBC Micro games to make use of speech, although this was something of an afterthought rather than meticulous planning. "The background speech was implemented late in the development of the game and was really featured due to boredom at that stage in development. It was actually very quick to implement and not too much RAM used. I think it ended up at just two or four possible volume levels to do the speech waveform, which was pumped out under interrupt control at a relatively low rate. The quality wasn't that great, of course, but it was an interesting effect







» An early puzzle: 1) Throw beaker beyond closing door, warp outside, retrieve 2) Fill with water 3) Place on closed door above flames, open door, quench fire, then retrieve Electronic Key device



» These birds are deeply irritating and block your path, but they can be useful later on by eating wasps



» Taken from the Amiga version, whose graphics were painted by Herman Serrano

beyond the usual beeps from the sound system on the BBC micro, and you could understand it – if you knew what it said!"

What made *Exile* stand apart was its physics engine based on real life gravity and inertia. Objects would bounce upon ground contact and collide with others, holding a heavy rock would slow down Finn's speed; wind drafts would repel Finn in different directions. Most impressive of all is Finn's movement, floating around in a manner expected of a space environment. Yet this aspect of *Exile*, turned out to be the easiest to program. "We both had a strong maths education, so the physics wasn't difficult except in balancing all the effects to work together properly (eg, what coefficients of restitution for different mass objects – ie, how fast to rebound off other things) and without using up much RAM or being slow," comments Irvin. "This was actually one of the most interesting bits to implement. The physics code was re-written several times to make it faster or to deal with new game features that required it." The remarkable physics engine combined with the intense puzzling of Mike Finn's escapades has yet to be replicated.

While the sheer size of the world is initially overwhelming, the variety of caverns, passages and creatures to encounter meant that exploration was the key to progress. Incredibly difficult, the multitude of puzzles had different solutions, giving the game a non-linear approach and the feeling of liberation that makes *Exile* such a compelling experience. The inability to die, merely re-spawning at the last teleport spot, added to the illusion of freedom and allowed players to take risks with their puzzle solving. Despite this, few have made it to the end, and even less have rescued all survivors, but those that have can rightfully be proud of the colossal achievement. The inclusion of hidden messages throughout the game such as 'She wants you badly' and 'You have killed Triax' were "partly to keep the hackers amused, and keep people guessing that there were things still to do in the game."

Creatures ranging from monkeys, birds, wasps and robots would hinder progress to various sections, and guns integrated in the scenery fired upon approach. Wasps would swarm, birds follow into the deepest depths of Phoebus, others simply turn away once left alone. The different approaches each species would use gave the impression of thinking ability, not computer-generated images. Irvin explains a little of how this was accomplished: "There were a set of powerful high-level functions that were available for each object's tactics/strategy code to use – like one that did 'move towards the last seen position of the object I'm following by walking on the ground', or 'fire my weapon at the nearest enemy type' – though it is more sophisticated that this. Each object had 'state' to keep track of what it is doing, and this is updated occasionally or according to various events that happen. Subroutines for tactics code were shared by various objects, so, for instance, a robot motion function would also be used by the crabs. This way memory was saved."

Interestingly, the novella (see boxout, left) that accompanied the game was conceived as a method to discourage piracy, although its inclusion also added value to the overall package. Written by Mark Cullen in conjunction with the game's authors, the novella added immersion to what was already an atmospheric experience, setting the scene for the game nicely. Sadly, the novella would not see life on the Amiga and Atari ST, with the story briefly re-written to keep the premise intact. "We had no control over this decision – I think it would have been better to keep the original story available for people to read if they so wished," remarks Irvin. "However, the BBC Micro audience was probably more cerebral than the later mass market Amiga audience because the BBC Micro was meant to be an educational machine before being a games machine." The other main copy protection method was in the way the game was programmed. If a copied or cracked version was detected, certain elements would malfunction, making it impossible to complete.

> "THE OVERALL DESIGN WAS LIMITED BY THE PROGRAMMING, WHICH IS KIND OF OPPOSITE TO WHAT HAPPENS IN GAMES TODAY"
> PETER IRVIN

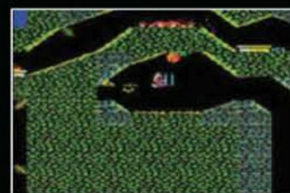
LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS

The success of the BBC Micro version meant that conversions to other computer formats were inevitable. *Exile* would see itself on the Acorn Electron, C64, Amiga, Atari ST and CD32, all offering the same epic world but with some alterations. The Electron version saw Finn's space suit change colour to yellow instead of magenta and Triax is cyan rather than green, while other graphical changes were down to the Electron's less powerful hardware. "We did the conversion for the C64," explains Irvin. "We paid for some people to do an initial direct conversion from BBC



The Runes

» The cryptic runes printed on the back of the novella contained important clues for the game's completion

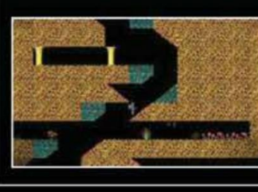


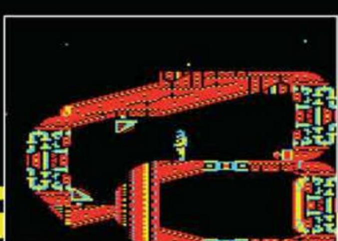
» Puzzles are an integral part to *Exile*. Getting the urn out of the room requires some thought combined with quick reflexes

EXILE RESURRECTION

Over the years, several people have tried to remake *Exile* for the PC although several of the projects have now closed down. One that was recently revived is by Symo (I S Storr) who has uploaded a beta demo on his website and does work on XP despite the doubts expressed in the readme. Quite a few features have yet to be implemented – there isn't any sound during play (although the files are available separately in the ZIP file) and it isn't possible to get/store objects into your inventory. It's coming along well – the movement of Finn is close to the original although the player sprite leaves much to be desired (to be replaced at some stage), although the bugs that allow you to get trapped under certain platforms are frustrating.

To download the demo version of this program, visit **www.symo.clara.net/exile**. For an exhaustive resource on *Exile* and game creator interviews, visit **www.exile.acornarcade.com/index.html**.

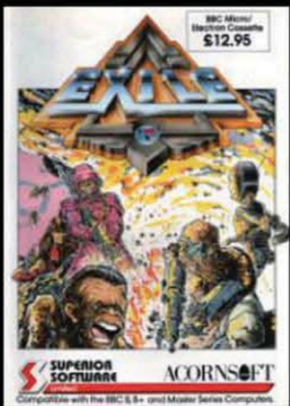




» BBC Electron version of *Exile* had less colourful visuals but gameplay remained the same

EXILE

"THE PHYSICS CODE WAS RE-WRITTEN SEVERAL TIMES TO MAKE IT FASTER OR TO DEAL WITH NEW GAME FEATURES THAT REQUIRED IT" PETER IRVIN



» The BBC Micro had three versions: BBC B cassette, BBC B 5.25" disc and BBC Master Compact 3.5" disc version



» The physics impact everything on Phoebus. Jerking will cause the water to fall out of the urn



» With the fire out, it's possible to collect the RCD, useful for opening certain electronic doors

assembler to 68000 (as we had no experience in this platform) and did the other improvements ourselves from this starting point."

Exile fan William Reeve who had just finished programming *Pipeline* on the BBC Micro, was responsible for the acclaimed Amiga version and also converted the Atari ST title. "The graphics were redone by a professional artist (Herman Serrano) supplied by the publisher (Audiogenic)," comments Irvin. Improving the graphics provided its own memory problems despite the superior technology and is the reason why the A500/600 version was just a straight port with enhanced visuals. The Atari ST version was faster than its Amiga counterpart and slightly better to look at overall. In 1995 the Amiga 1200 would see an AGA release, this time by Tony Cox, offering a revamped look and extra areas. The CD32 edition was based on the Amiga 1200 version, with the graphics 50 per cent zoomed in to fit a console environment, which in itself threw up some scrolling problems during programming and limitations of memory. In order to compensate, a high amount of compression was used for the save game file.

Although the multi-format conversions keep all gameplay features intact, it's the BBC Micro version that remains the most popular: "I think the 16-bit versions were better than the 8-bit versions, though they have less of an impact in people's minds on these platforms because the BBC version really did stretch the limits for the machine. Some people that had already played the BBC version and then played the Amiga version preferred the BBC version."

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND!

Jeremy Smith went on to work as a graphics artist for games like *Supercars* at Magnetic Fields before joining Core Design and producing titles like *Wonderdog*. Sadly, Jeremy Smith passed away shortly after, in 1992, leaving Irvin to reminisce about the talented programmer. "It was good to work with Jeremy on *Exile* – at that time it would have been too difficult to do such a game without some kind of team support. It was not difficult to split the work between us, and it was great to have someone turn up with a chunk of code that just slots in and suddenly makes a big change."

After *Exile*, Peter Irvin worked on 3D design for *Frontier Elite II* on the Amiga and Atari ST before developing Sega 32x title *Darxide* with Frontier Developments, a shoot-'em-up that was released at the end of the machine's life span. Nowadays, Peter Irvin runs Inventivity (**www.inventivity.com**) working on titles for mobile devices.

A sequel for *Exile* was never in the pipeline, leaving Mike Finn resigned to exploring Phoebus for over 15 years, still offering a captivating experience for those who stumble across it. Those interested in seeing the hapless space hero return to Phoebus should keep an eye on Irvin's website for updates. "Strangely, I was recently contracted to implement a version of *Exile* as a demo for a big mobile phone chipset supplier – for the Broadcom 2702 Game Framework. This was a bizarre experience having to go back to the old game and produce a version of *Exile* in C (the Amiga AGA version). I hope this actually gets put on the client's customers' phones as *Exile* really works well on these mobile platforms – the small screen works well, and the gameplay with *Exile* can be dropped and picked up without problem – which really is a requirement on these devices. I have decided that I might as well do something with the new code and put it on other phone platforms too – like Nokia Series 60 and Microsoft Windows Mobile devices – watch this space!"

Thanks to Peter Irvin for talking to us. Credit to Hall of Light (**http://hol.abime.net/**) for the box scans.

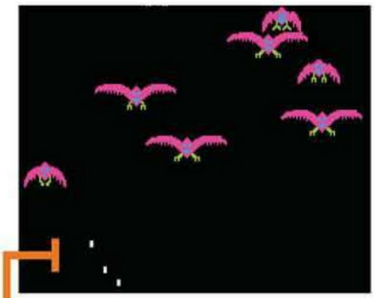


» Even today, the variety of colours used makes planet Phoebus a fascinating place to explore

BOSS/RUSH

WHERE WE SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR…

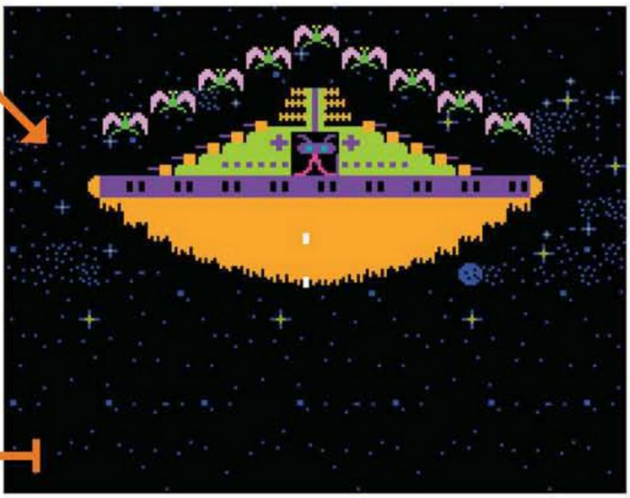
THE MOTHERSHIP IN PHOENIX



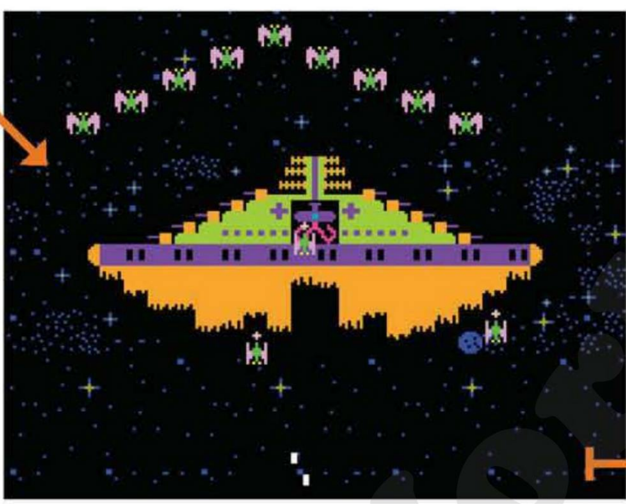
GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1980
- » **PUBLISHER:** CENTURI/TAITO
- » **DEVELOPER:** AMSTAR ELECTRONICS



» To begin with the Mothership has a full hull and several back-up fighters. But you… You have gutsy determination!



» Weave between incoming shots, avoid enemy fighters, and keep firing like a deranged madman. Maniacal laughing is optional.

***Phoenix* was an arcade game for several reasons. Not only was it an excellent shoot-'em-up by American company Amstar Electronics, when Japan was already making the genre its own (Amstar was based in Phoenix Arizona, hence the name), but it's also one of, if not the earliest example of a shoot-'em-up with a final separate boss section: the fear-inducing Mothership, straight out of hell's depths. So gear up space pilot, because you're the last man left standing against the genocide of humanity.**

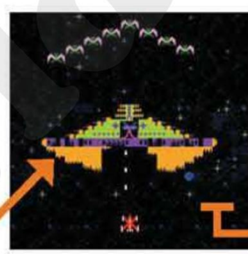
It's a harrowing experience reaching this final confrontation, drifting through empty space facing off against the top four squadrons in the alien invasion force. Things begin with some classical music, enhancing the desolation of cold space and acting as a reminder of the human heritage you're fighting for. Suddenly, without warning, the first squadron of 16 small birds looms out of the blackness; the battle has begun. Their perfect formation isn't kept and soon they're making blind runs and kamikaze dives! You must hold the position and face this enemy head-on, firing lasers and using your ship's shield generator. By now the music is replaced with screeches which adapt as the birds move, almost taunting you. The third and fourth squadrons are eggs out of which hatch larger Phoenix-like birds. You fire wildly, the lasers cutting their wings one at a time, but suddenly the depraved cads regenerate these lost limbs. The only certain way to kill them is aiming for the head – it's going to be a long struggle to reach the ultimate enemy. But you must maintain, godammit!

And then finally it appears, The Mothership. There's no time to relax since a fresh squadron of bird-meat needs killing and the alien commander is gunning for your blood. So have your weapons armed and your thrusters burning hot. The first task is to burn through that massive orange shielding on the Mothership's underside, whilst avoiding random squadron attacks.

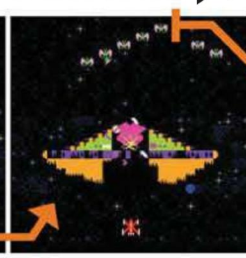
Even after managing to simultaneously blast a clear path through the hull and avoid being incinerated by hostile fire, there's still the small matter of a moving shield-conveyor-belt. After blasting a hole clean through it the purple band continues to move, thereby carrying the vulnerable cavity away until it disappears off one end and emerges on the other. There's no point even trying to aim anymore, just keep hitting the fire button and pray to your deity of choice that something makes it through when the hole makes its return journey. With the original *Star Wars* film having come out three years previously, the similarities to the Death Star trench run are undeniable.

Eventually, should you be lucky enough to avoid the barrage of kamikaze dives and the alien commander's stream of fire, a burning orb of man-made death (the best kind of death) will find its way inside the alien's supreme chamber. The resulting chain-reaction detonates not only the massive carrier vessel, but also the surrounding attack squadron. You've just obliterated the first shoot-'em-up boss ever (well, probably), and your reward is? Another classical composition of music for you to saviour, and then once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more.

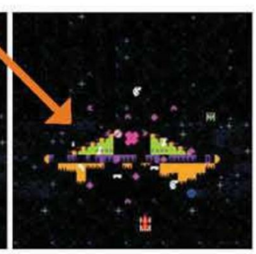
THEIR FORMATION ISN'T KEPT AND SOON THEY'RE MAKING BLIND RUNS AND KAMIKAZE DIVES, BUT YOU MUST MAINTAIN, GODAMMIT!



» The orange shielding has been worn away, now's your chance to breach the purple conveyor belt and land a lucky shot.



» Yeehah! Eat deadly lasers of death and die, you soon-to-be-dead harbinger of ultimate… death!



» Shrapnel and debris go flying everywhere, but sadly this isn't the end. The only salvation from this war is death.



SONIC TEAM









WE LOOK AT THE RISE AND FALL OF ONE OF SEGA'S GREAT DEVELOPMENT TEAMS...





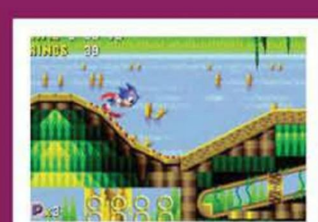














It's hard to believe that more than 15 years have passed since the world-renowned Sonic Team that we all know and love came crashing into a million living rooms in a blur of blue spines, Nintendo-baiting attitude and breath-taking speed. Sean Smith takes the opportunity to look back at the legendary Sega subsidiary, and even got to chat with a bona-fide legend



» Where the magic happens. Sonic Team was born inside this building



» A classic, word-heavy US ad from the early Nineties. In your face, Mario!

Before 1991, Sega may well have had a 16-bit machine to have a decent crack at the console war with, but it certainly didn't have a mascot who was fit enough to lick the boots of Nintendo's beloved plumber. Alex Kidd – the nearest thing Sega had to a games hero – may have been reasonably entertaining, but at the time the Mega Drive console was usually bundled with the decidedly dodgy *Altered Beast*, and save for a few arcade conversions there was little to set it apart from its competitors. The folks at Sega HQ needed this situation to change, and change quickly, and most people who are old enough to remember or come with a modicum of games-related knowledge should know what happened next. Sega bigwigs demand satisfaction, crack existing talent, form whizzy new team, latent design genius creates edgy, too cool-for-school character, advertising campaign goes into overdrive… the outcome is Sonic Team, the most recognisable Sega development team of all, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Wind forward a little, though. Taking a look at the last commercially successful games to display the Sonic Team logo, the atrocious *Shadow The Hedgehog* and the poor *Sonic Riders*, and you have to ask: what happened to these elite development bods? How come that, while the Sonic Team name still exists, the key members of staff have pretty much deserted in their entirety? Needless to say there has been a lot of conflict in between, with bitter departures, duff decisions and Sega obviously no longer part of the hardware war.

It was certainly apparent that Yuji Naka had his mind on other matters when we spoke to him way back at the start of 2006. In our own inimitably enthusiastic manner, we asked the great man what it was like to work for the legendary team, and to describe the atmosphere there. "Sonic Team is a very enjoyable place to work at. It is a very worthwhile thing to be able to work with people who have the same aspirations as yourself." His stunted responses did not stretch far in terms of revelations or exclusive content. When asked about which title he was most proud of, rather than wax lyrical about any of the cast-in-stone classics covered elsewhere in this very feature, he answered in a non-committal fashion: "I am proud of every single game I've been involved with. I am not going to say they are all the best, but they do all reflect the hard work and thought put into them at the time we were creating them." That's that cleared up, then.

After his somewhat cautious replies it came as no surprise to us when Naka announced on 8 May 8 2006 that he was to depart from Sonic Team to form his own development team, named PROPE. For many, this announcement represented the 'true' end of Sonic Team, particularly given the fact that some ten or more staff members were poached for the purpose. Partially funded by Sega, it will be interesting to see how things pan out for PROPE. It has been difficult to get excited about Sonic Team for some time now, and many of Naka's fans will be hoping that the creative juices are flowing once again within the legendary games icon. In the meantime it's a perfect opportunity to have a look back at the highs and lows of Sonic Team, and to find out how things ended this way.

The 15-strong group that was to become Sonic Team all those years ago featured an astonishing amount of talent. First among them being rising star and company golden boy Yuji Naka.

Naka had worked at Sega since the mid-Eighties, taking his bow with the simplistic *Girls Garden* on Sega's SG-1000 machine, and working on some impressive arcade conversions for both the Master System and Mega Drive, such as *OutRun* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. A keen programmer since his youth, it was noted that he had an almost obsessive need for perfection, and an eye for detail that set him apart from his colleagues. This was despite the fact that he quit formal education to pursue his dream in the world of computing, something that led rival company Namco to turn him down for a job due to a lack of a college degree. In 1988, his burgeoning talents took him to the recently created AM8 division, which was fronted by future Sega executive vice president Shinobu Toyoda. Naka's time spent there gave him the opportunity to brush shoulders with existing talent and other emerging young bucks, such as Naoto Ohshima, with whom he worked with on *Phantasy Star II*, and Hirokazu Yasuhara, whose flair for level design would eventually make the *Sonic* concept a reality. It is not necessary for us to discuss in any further detail the creation of *Sonic The Hedgehog*; this has been looked at elsewhere and in far more depth.

When several million Genesis consoles had been knocked out to the States, giving Sega the sort of business it craved, Sonic Team should have gone from strength to strength. This was not to be

IN THE KNOW

Sonic Team, originally Sega AM8, took its name from the classic game it created in 1991. Formed in Japan, the company split in pieces in 1999 with some staff relocating to form a new team in the USA. The original lineup of developers has now all but disbanded; Sonic Team exists in name only. Founder member Yuji Naka has formed a new studio, and Sonic Team USA is no more.



» Where it all started for Mr Naka waaaay back when

SONIC TEAM

LICENSED TO HELL

Sonic Team not only created one of the most recognisable icons in gaming history, it also created a media and merchandise frenzy. Everyone wanted a piece of the *Hedgehog* pie – standard items such as plush toys, lunchboxes and LCD games were churned out, while in Japan, *Sonic* was licensed to children's hydraulic amusement rides, such as the tremendously named Waku Waku Sonic Patrol Car. In addition to levering more pocket money away from kids, there was also a plethora of animated television shows of varying quality, ranging from the slapstick *Adventures Of Sonic The Hedgehog* to the moody, Manga-influenced *Sonic X*. Still on the box today and reportedly created with the advice of Sonic Team themselves, it features a wisecracking, attitude-packed Hedgehog doing battle with Dr Eggman, giant mecha, and the bizarrely named Dark Oak, who sounds more like a real ale than a worthy adversary for Sonic.

the case, however. Fed up with Sega's pay policy, which favoured seniority over creative endeavour, Naka upped sticks along with Yasuhara. It didn't take long, however, before the newly appointed head of Sega's developmental operations in the US contacted Naka to come and join him in sunny California. Mark Cerny was a long established name in the business, and had created trackball-tastic arcade puzzler *Marble Madness*, among others. A friend and acquaintance of Naka, he recognised the talent going begging and promptly requested his involvement with his Sega Technical Institute. Conveniently, Yasuhara happened to be in the US at the same time, so the three put their heads together to work on a handful of *Sonic* sequels, culminating in 1994 with the impressive *Sonic & Knuckles*, which used innovative 'lock on' technology, with players able to link other *Sonic* games to the *Sonic & Knuckles* cartridge to unlock exclusive content.

Seven *Sonic* titles had been either created or supervised by members of the temporarily disbanded Sonic Team before Naka-san was tempted back to Japan in 1994 with an offer of a role as producer. This move reunited the original team for the first time in over three years, with the fertile imaginations of Ohshima and Naka brainstorming once again for original ideas. Yasuhara quit shortly after the release of *Sonic & Knuckles*, citing an argumentative relationship with Naka. He went on to assist in the creation of other non-Sonic Team titles for Sega of America, but had left Sega for good by 2002. Any bad blood is long forgotten in Naka's eyes, acknowledging the debt owed to his former workmate: "Hirokazu Yasuhara is a wonderfully capable and creative person and I truly admire his work. Even now, we call the enemy layout of the traditional *Sonic* 'the Yasuhara Setting'." Whether Yasuhara-san ever scales similar heights to his early design masterworks remains to be seen. He was last known to have been involved with the *Jak* series of games for the PlayStation 2. Overkill or not, *Sonic* had been incredibly popular and for the most part critically lauded, but now was clearly time for some new gaming concepts and franchises. One only has to investigate the slew of Game Gear and 8-bit *Sonic* spin-offs to see why. As Naka and his team beavered away on what were to become some of the finest titles ever released under the Sega banner, their much-loved franchise was dished out to other developers to tinker with. The likes of UK-based Traveller's Tales attempted to freshen up the adventures of Mr Hedgehog and co, however the games that followed were average at best, perhaps peaking with the enjoyable 'racing' title, *Sonic R* (which Yasuhara-san had a hand in). This period is now looked back upon as being a turbulent chapter in Sega's history, as it attempted to up the ante and gain a bigger share of the market by releasing constant hardware upgrades in quick succession. The Mega Drive was followed by the Mega CD, each redesigned along the way. Next came the 32X, a mushroom-like device with increased power but a tiny catalogue

> "HIROKAZU YASUHARA IS A WONDERFULLY CAPABLE AND CREATIVE PERSON AND I ADMIRE HIS WORK. EVEN NOW, WE CALL THE ENEMY LAYOUT OF THE TRADITIONAL SONIC 'THE YASUHARA SETTING'"
>
> YUJI NAKA



» *NiGHTS* reborn on PS2 via the EyeToy. But fans are rabid for a true sequel



» Sonic Team gave Saturn gamers the bestest Xmas ever



» Japanese kids have it so much better. Seen one of these outside Netto lately?

of titles that further added to the pile of gaming kit under your television. Don't forget to get the kids a Sega Pico, aimed at the two-to-seven-year-old market. A portable Mega Drive even turned up in the form of the Nomad, before the Saturn was announced to much cynicism.

Despite the pessimism that surrounded it, the Saturn looked like it was a pretty handy piece of kit. Gamers in Japan slavered over the prospect of *Virtua Fighter* in their own homes. And, as such, much attention was placed upon what Naka and his cohorts were up to on Sega's new console. Could they deliver? The answer was a resounding yes.

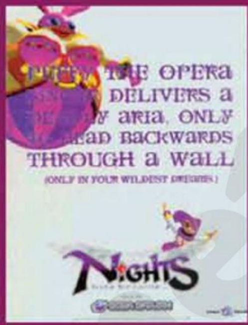
"These titles were initially created with caution. It was seen as too delicate to create a sequel," Yuji Naka answers when quizzed as to why we have yet to see sequels to *NiGHTS Into Dreams* or *Burning Rangers*, the fruits of Sonic Team's labour between the conception, birth, and untimely death of the Sega Saturn. The former in particular showed the developers' flair for innovation, as it introduced what is generally believed to be the first analogue pad for a home console. Considered by some to be a work of art which transcends videogaming, *NiGHTS* is a spellbinding experience, but did not shift Saturn units in the same way that *Sonic* shifted 16-bit hardware, as the lure of PlayStation and, to a lesser extent, *Mario 64*, meant that Sega was third place. The Saturn was all but finished in the West by the time the criminally overlooked *Burning Rangers* received its unlikely PAL release, as Sega concentrated on the development of its new projects, one that promised futuristic, 128-bit technology, and the exciting prospect of online gaming.

The Dreamcast launched in Japan in 1998, and it did not take long before Sonic Team decided to resurrect its most famous creation. At the time, the Dreamcast was easily the most powerful machine on the market. Sega's Naomi arcade hardware could be almost perfectly emulated using the console, and, graphically, in the right hands, it was capable of the sort of quality that could only be achieved on a powerful PC. Yasuhara's replacement Takashi Iizuka had for a long time wanted to create a Sonic RPG, and, finally, Sega had a machine that was capable of doing justice to his vision. Thus, *Sonic Adventure* was born, and released to much excitement from those who witnessed the speed, fluidity and graphical tour de force in action. The spiny one's initial appearance on this futuristic, 'next-gen' media has its share of detractors, but still looks luscious and plays extremely well. Designer Yuji Uekawa gave the characters a 'cool', stylised feel, while axe-meister and resident music guru Jun Senoue laid down the licks to give the series a distinctly 'rock' flavour. *Flickies' Island* this wasn't. There have been numerous 3D *Sonic* titles since, including the sequel, yet none have achieved the 'wow' factor of the original *Sonic Adventure*.

The completion of *Sonic Adventure* saw big changes in the company. Twelve members of the team moved to the US and established the San Francisco-based Sonic Team USA. As with any shake-up in a large firm, there were detractors. Shortly after Sonic Team USA had opened its account with the rushed, critically panned, glitch-filled *Sonic Adventure 2*, some big names, including Youji Ishii and Ohshima-san, left to form a new company, christened Artoon. The new venture had a vast talent resource of ex-Sonic Team staff to draw upon, but strangely has worked on little ever since. Artoon has so far flopped with the commercially and critically unsuccessful *Blinx* franchise, the lukewarm Game Boy Advance release *Pinobee No Daibouken*, and the poorly received *Yoshi's Universal Gravitation* for the GBA. It's hard to believe that these titles were created by the man whose Midas touch helped design or direct *Burning Rangers*, *Sonic CD* and *NiGHTS*. It is hoped that the more recently released *Yoshi's Island 2* will see a change in fortunes. Naka-san revealed to us the impact of Ohshima's departure and his ongoing influence on where the company sits today: "I'm sorry to say that we lost a main member of Sonic Team when Ohshima-san decided to leave, but we continue to create products that use his original ideas."

With Naka-san thankfully still on board, Sonic Team went on to finally

"CONSIDERED BY SOME TO BE A WORK OF ART WHICH TRANSCENDS VIDEOGAMING, NIGHTS INTO DREAMS IS A TRULY SPELLBINDING EXPERIENCE, BUT DID NOT SHIFT THE SATURN"



» *NiGHTS*: even the adverts had a dream-like mystique about them



» *Sonic X* as kids see him on telly through their E-numbers haze



» Dark Oak from *Sonic X*. Best served chilled…



FINEST HOUR
Samba De Amigo (Japanese arcades 1999, Dreamcast 2000)
A monkey named Amigo implores you to stand bow-legged in front of your telly, frantically gyrating, with maracas all over the shop. Add psychedelic graphics, and the only recorded case of the 'Macarena' appearing cool and acceptable; this rhythm action gem was a masterstroke and a real piece of gaming history.

SONIC TEAM





» The sombre scene that meets failure to get one's 'groove' on

achieve success in the arcade market after previous non-starters or relative failures to establish *Sonic* as a coin-op player. In a big financial gamble on the bemani fever gripping Japan, Sega released the incredibly entertaining *Samba De Amigo* in 1999. Although a rhythm action game in the traditional sense, *Samba* was set apart by sharp, colourful graphics, ridiculously daft music tracks, and the genius addition of the maracas peripheral as players shake along to Uekawa-san's smiling, simian creation. The title was converted impeccably to the Dreamcast, and is another Sonic Team milestone of innovation and supreme game design.

"*ChuChu Rocket* was positioned as an important title for Sonic Team and was one of the main initiatives in our effort toward online gaming," reveals Naka when we questioned him about Sonic Team's involvement with creating online games for the Dreamcast. If *ChuChu Rocket* dipped a toe tentatively into the waters of online gaming, Naka chose to dive in when he dragged *Phantasy Star* kicking and screaming into the new millennium in its online guise. With a



» *Phantasy Star Online*: superb online adventure, sadly ruined by cheaters

GAMES REVIEWS



PHANTASY STAR

1987/92 SONIC TEAM

» Created while still under the AM8 banner the original *Phantasy Star* contained some fresh features that were stunning at the time, such as pseudo-3D, maze-like dungeons that could be explored in real time, and a battery backed cartridge to save your game position. Kicking off the now wildly popular franchise, this is a difficult yet rewarding experience, which stands up reasonably well today.

80%



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

1991 SONIC TEAM

» AM8 hit the jackpot with its first *Sonic* game, shifting Mega Drive bundles hand over fist, and combining an astonishing sense of speed with level design that felt as fresh as a daisy. With day-glo graphics to die for and a musical score by an actual J-pop band, it was simple for beginners to thrash through, but with the now-standard Chaos Emerald 'secret' element, harboured real depth. A true classic.

90%



RISTAR

1995 SONIC TEAM

» Were it not for the arrival of 32-bit technology and Sega's own hardware-release overkill, *Ristar* could have attained a status similar to that of his spiny stablemate. *Ristar* uses his extendable arms to move around and pick up objects, mechanics Yuji Naka had originally intended Sonic would use, before speed became first priority. A superb game that should have fared better, but easy and cheap to pick up.

85%



SONIC CD

1993 SONIC TEAM

» Considered by most long term fans to be the best in the series, *Sonic CD* was handled by Naoto Ohshima after Yuji Naka had hopped across the Pacific to the US. Superb graphics, a mind-bending time travel element to the gameplay, and a cracking soundtrack (in Japan, anyway), devoted fans could be seen weeping tears of joy in the streets when this was featured on the recent *Sonic Gems* collection.

94%

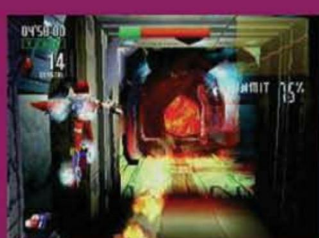


NIGHTS INTO DREAMS

1996 SONIC TEAM

» With themes of nightmares, dreams and human personalities, this was no ordinary gaming experience. Taking control of one of two children and ultimately the enigmatic NiGHTS himself, the analogue stick is used to guide your avatar fluidly around a wonderfully rendered 2D/3D dreamscape, as a sophisticated scoring system and remarkable, evolving musical score envelop.

95%



BURNING RANGERS

1998 SONIC TEAM

» The death throes of the Saturn gave us some great titles, as developers squeezed miracles out of the hardware. Sonic Team really hit the spot with this rip-roaring 3D fire-fighting romp. With Manga stylings and cutscenes, commendable replay value and a mental plot, this is a grade-A platform actioner. Like many Sonic Team classics, fans have demanded a sequel ever since, to no avail.

90%



CHUCHU ROCKET!

1999/2000/2001 SONIC TEAM

» With a simple premise (cat-and-mouse board game puzzle – with rockets!) and addictive gameplay, Sonic Team created a multi-player experience with online functionality, now recognised as being the first commercially successful console release that could be played across the interweb. Later given away free to lure DC gamers online, the frantic brainteaser still delights today.

89%



SONIC SHUFFLE

2000 SONIC TEAM

» In a move to capitalise on the popularity of Nintendo's highly entertaining *Mario Party* series, Sonic Team jumped into bed with the same co-developer and produced an underwhelming board-game-style party experience. With confusing mini-games more often than not left to chance rather than skill, unacceptable loading times and cheating computer-controlled characters, this was a low point.

55%



"[SONIC TEAM'S] APPROACH WAS ALWAYS TO CREATE STRATEGIC TITLE CONCEPTS, WHICH INCLUDED THE HARDWARE; WE DO SOMEWHAT MISS THE IDEA OF BEING ABLE TO ADDRESS THESE CONSTANT CHALLENGES"

YUJI NAKA

built-in modem to play with, a linear, *Final Fantasy* style RPG would have been somewhat un-ambitious given the power coursing through the Dreamcast's innards. Naka confirms this: "It was planned originally to be an online title and we're very pleased with the results." Although the Dreamcast was usurped with clinical efficiency by the PS2, *Phantasy Star Online* was wildly popular, spawning a second Dreamcast incarnation, and going on to be one of the biggest selling titles for the console. Unfortunately this was to be the last time that Sonic Team would work with a Sega machine, as the Dreamcast was discontinued, after little more than three years, in 2001. Some incredible games were developed by Sonic Team in full, 128-bit glory. We asked Naka how the failure and withdrawal of the machine affected him and the team. In keeping with the general tone of his interview, his answer is somewhat brief and impenetrable. Scratch beneath the surface, however, and it belies a real sadness given Sega's move to concentrate on software and developing games: "Our approach was always to create strategic title concepts, which included the hardware. We do somewhat miss the idea of being able to address these constant challenges."

In 2000, Sega took the decision to split the myriad AM divisions away from the main company to form several subsidiaries, with Sonic Team being renamed SONICTEAM Ltd. Given Sega's bleak financial situation, many of the smaller subsidiaries had to fold or merge with others in order to survive. SONICTEAM, who were financially solvent, absorbed United Game Artists (AM9) in 2003, a division who had created highly original and critically acclaimed fare such as *Rez* and *Space Channel 5*.

The period from the death of the Dreamcast until the present day has been disappointing for fans. Little appeared in the way of original Sonic Team content, with GBA and multi-format ports of earlier *Sonic* games being the order of the day. When a 'new' concept did arrive, it was a remake of the 15-year old Compile puzzler, *Puyo Puyo*, or the good-looking but mediocre *Billy Hatcher & The Giant Egg*. In 2004, Sammy bought a controlling interest in Sega to form the Sega Sammy Corporation. This was the catalyst for SONICTEAM Ltd being re-integrated into the main company, with its original name intact. Sonic Team USA, fronted by Iizuka-san, became Sega Studios USA.

Sonic Team now exists in name only, after a glorious run of success, certainly from '91 to 2000. Few companies can claim to have released as many triple-A titles over such a lengthy period. All is not lost, however. PROPE is closely connected to and part-owned by Sega. It is hoped that some of the creative genius displayed by Naka and his team pre-2000 will be given free reign now he is effectively working on his own. Chances are we won't see another *Shadow The Hedgehog* with Naka's name connected to it.



AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

Shadow The Hedgehog (Multi, 2005)

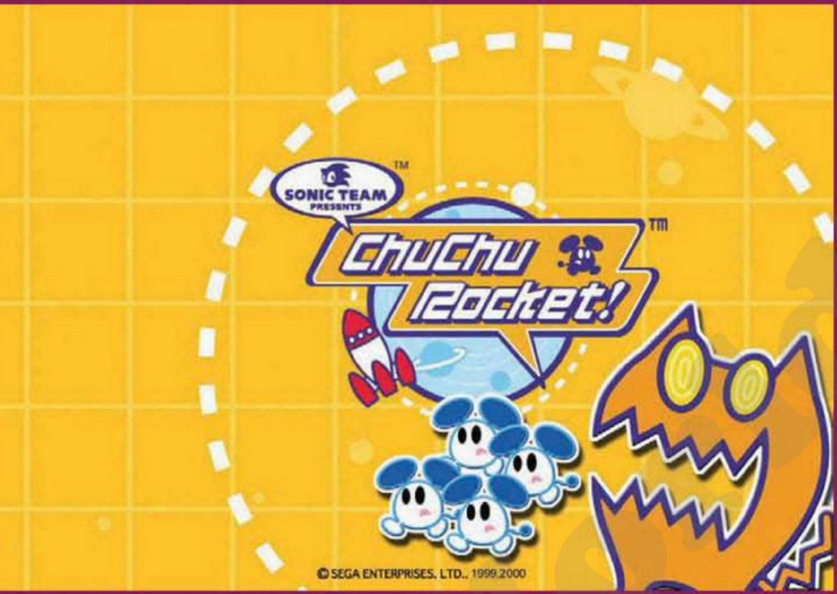
Encapsulating the poor recent output of the company, *Shadow* eschews the purity and fun of the early Sonic Team titles in favour of guns and misfiring Noughties attitude, in a shocker that features awful level design, poor controls and a woefully bad camera. The anti-*Sonic* game in every respect.

PETITION TIME

NiGHTS Into Dreams is one of Sega's most beloved games and you only have to go online to see how much demand there is for a sequel.

Websites such as **www.petitiononline.com** feature several fights for the cause, from the inane premise of demanding Sega to produce a sequel on the Dreamcast, to the worthy shout of a DS or for some stylus-led action. When quizzed on any future developments on this front, Naka is not very forthcoming; "I'll leave that up to your imagination." Next-gen emulation may be the most hopeful means of enjoying these games again and, with the impending arrival of the Wii download service there are many more titles that deserve to become more accessible to today's retro-hungry gamer. Before his departure Naka advised us that, "Sega will start by providing from the Mega Drive generation". Let's hope the Saturn is next to receive some emulation love. We'd be first to cover it.





» A superb puzzler that introduced many Dreamcast owners to the joys of online play. Also received a great GBA adaptation



» Quite possibly the greatest *Sonic the Hedgehog* game ever



» The finest *Sonic* game of them all, perhaps? Cool box, anyhow

ANOTHER WORLD

From the stunning opening sequence to its shocking conclusion, Another World dragged players on a rollercoaster ride through a living, breathing alien landscape. In this revealing feature, Martyn Carroll talks to creator Eric Chahi, and discovers that the story behind Another World is as extraordinary as the game itself

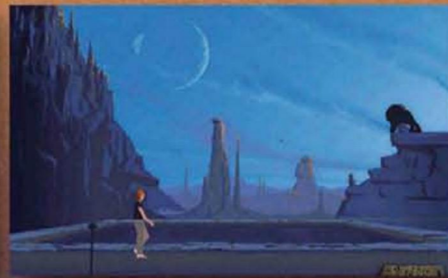




» The 'hero' of *Another World* attempts a futile peace gesture…



» … only to end up blasted by a stun gun and suspended in a cage



» Here's a lovely Hi-Res screenshot of *Another World: 15th Anniversary Edition* that has just been released for the PC

These days it's hard to imagine a commercial game being conceived, designed and developed by an individual, whereas back in the early Eighties such a feat was commonplace, with bedroom coders churning out 8-bit hits. As the market matured and the games became more and more complex, programmers were pooled together to create slick development teams capable of meeting criteria and hitting deadlines. The days in which individuals were able to deliver their singular visions were seemingly over.

Then in 1991 the gaming public was invited to glimpse, *Another World* (known as *Out Of The World* in the US), an arcade adventure single-handedly created for the Commodore Amiga by Eric Chahi. During the game's two-year development period, the Frenchman filled the role of designer, programmer and artist. He even painted the cover art. Aside from the audio, which was supplied by close friend Jean-Francois Freitas, *Another World* was solely Chahi's creation. In the evolving 16-bit era this was almost unheard of.

ANOTHER AUTEUR

Chahi's route into game creation was fairly typical, with him spending much of his teenage life experimenting with computers. "During the school holidays I didn't see a lot of sun," he tells us with some pride. "Programming quickly became an obsession and I spent around 17 hours a day in front of a computer screen."

After leaving school he decided to pursue game creation as a full-time job. With several titles already published for the Oric-1 and Amstrad CPC in France, a small software company called Chips quickly hired him. "The boss took me on as a programmer and I said, to his surprise, that I wanted to be a graphic artist instead. I was becoming tired of programming and my main area of interest was fantasy illustration, painting and animation. So I stayed for a year with the company, developing my graphic skills. Then, in 1989, I met Paul Cuisset at Delphine and I become the lead artist on *Future Wars*."

Released in 1990, *Future Wars* was a memorable point-and-click adventure that benefited greatly from Chahi's graphics work. Somewhat surprisingly, he admits that one of the joys of working on *Future Wars* was that he was surrounded by an experienced team, meaning that he no longer had to struggle with projects single-handedly. But by working as part of a team, Chahi had to sacrifice overall creative control. This did not sit well with the unique vision he had for *Another World*.

"I felt that I had something very personal to communicate and in order to bring my true vision to others, I had to develop the title on my own. But the transition from 8-bit to 16-bit had been difficult for me; programming became more and more complex and I'd get lost trying to manage it all. Luckily, many excellent books and tools were released that enabled easy development on the Amiga. Thanks to these, I felt confident I could go back to programming, and was sure I could handle the project on my own. I didn't decide to go it alone for the challenge, but because I felt it was necessary to create my game without any commercial pressure."

So after finishing work on *Future Wars*, Chahi was given a choice: either contribute to Delphine's next game or forge ahead with his own project. He opted for the latter and work on *Another World* began.

To call Chahi an auteur is apt, as his "true vision" is perhaps more cinematic than any other game of the early Nineties. Beyond the opening movie, which sees red-haired nuclear scientist Lester Cheykin sucked into an alternate dimension following a failed experiment, there's no real narrative as such. Lester simply moves from location to location, desperately trying to avoid grim death lurking around every corner. Within the first few minutes Lester must escape from a watery grave, stamp on a spawn of poisonous slug-things and outsmart a snarling dog-beast. The strange alien world he has been accidentally transported to is alive with danger, and the opening scene sets the game's frantic pace and distinctive tone. After running into Buddy, an alien friend, Lester grabs a laser gun and must fight his way through an alien citadel swarming with enemy soldiers. There is never any mention of Lester returning home – the primary concern is to stay alive in this brutal world.

The game plays like a short movie, featuring scenes rather than levels. And each scene is beautifully staged, with a cinematic quality that elevates the game far above its peers. "I wanted to create a truly immersive game in a very consistent, living universe with a movie feel," he says. "I never wanted to create an interactive movie. Instead I wanted to extract the essence of a movie – the rhythm and the drama – and place it into game form. To do this I decided to leave the screen free of the usual information aids like an energy bar, score counter and other icons.



» A stroke of genius. Eric Chahi's preliminary studies for his striking cover-art painting

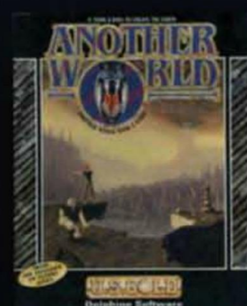


» Gaining a weapon finally allows you to fight back against *Another World's* inhabitants

IN THE KNOW

ANOTHER WORLD

» **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY, US GOLD, VIRGIN
» **DEVELOPER:** ERIC CHAHI/DELPHINE
» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **GENRE:** 2D GRAPHIC ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3-£10



"ANOTHER WORLD IS A GAME OF SURVIVAL IN A HOSTILE WORLD, AND IT REALLY IS ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH" ERIC CHAHI

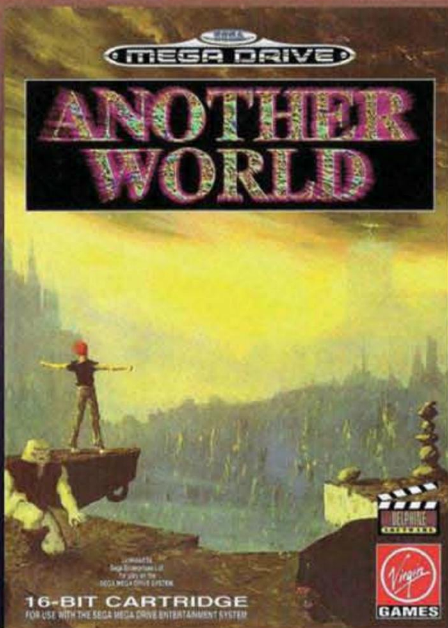
ANOTHER WORLD

HEART BROKEN

During the development of *Another World*, Chahi was allowed to work without any pressure from publishers. But it was inevitable that such an acclaimed game would open a few eyes. Interplay entered into discussions with Chahi over a sequel – for Sega's Mega-CD system. "Interplay wanted to do a sequel for the Mega-CD, mainly to justify the use of the CD unit," he says. "I must admit, I wasn't up for a sequel, and was worried about what Interplay would do to my game. After discussions its guys convinced me. But, I did insist that I didn't want a true sequel, so I offered the idea of replaying the original adventure from another angle by controlling Buddy. Sadly, Interplay didn't do a very good job. The soul of the original game was missing, and I felt more than a little deceived when I saw that my original concept had been destroyed." The sequel was subtitled *Heart Of The Alien* and it's telling that many gamers don't even know the game exists.



"BY DOING ANOTHER WORLD I LEARNT A LOT ABOUT SUGGESTION. I LEARNT THAT THE MEDIUM IS THE PLAYER'S OWN IMAGINATION" ERIC CHAHI



» The SNES and Mega Drive releases came as a surprise to some, as the game certainly wasn't a typical console title



» All the sprites in the game were assembled from scalable vector shapes

Everything had to be in the universe, with no interruptions getting in the way."

VISION THING

Chahi reveals that Jordan Machner's *Karateka* strongly influenced the game's visual style, but inspiration was also drawn from a variety of other sources. "I was influenced by everything I liked at that time. This included pictorial art and the movie *Star Wars*. Science-fiction books, comics and fantasy art also inspired me. Painters like Michael Whelan, Richard Corben and Frank Frazetta also provided some material for me to draw ideas from."

To create the look of *Another World*, Chahi took the unusual step of using polygons to create a 2D game. And for that he owes a debt of gratitude to Dirk the Daring. "I played the *Dragon's Lair* port for the Amiga, which boasted incredible full-screen action scenes, and became hooked on achieving similar life-like animation. The graphics in *Dragon's Lair* weren't polygons, but were compressed bitmaps read directly from the disk. I thought I could do the same with polygons since the animation was flat, so I wrote some vector-based code. The idea was to use polygons not only for movie-like animation and cutscenes, but also for the sprites. This proved to be a major advantage because you had large sprites that were scalable and took up less disk space than traditional sprites."

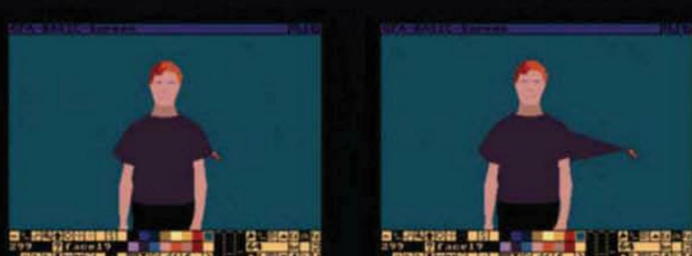
Chahi then used the rotoscoping process to breathe life into the flat vector shapes. The technique, used so successfully in the original *Prince Of Persia* game, allowed for realistically animated characters. The only downside to the polygonal approach was that the level of graphical detail had to be sacrificed. "2D polygon techniques are great for animation but the price you pay is the lack of detail. Because I couldn't include much detail, I decided to work with the player's imagination, creating suggestive content instead of being highly descriptive. That's why, for example, the beast in the first scene is impressive even if it is only a big black shape. The visual style of *Another World* is really descended from the black-and-white comic-book style, where shape and volume are suggested in a very subtle way. By doing *Another World* I learnt a lot about suggestion. I learnt that the medium is the player's own imagination."

DIRECTOR'S CUT

Following its debut on the Amiga, an Atari ST version appeared and other ports were planned. To address concerns that the game was too short, the PC and console versions included a lengthy bonus scene that slotted neatly into the main game.

"After the initial Amiga release many gamers were frustrated by the short length of the game. Even though I was exhausted after two long years of intense development, I agreed with the critics and I thought it was important to add something. But I didn't want to simply add a level just to make it longer. The key thing for me was to create a level that was very coherent with the game's structure. The best place for this was just before the arena when Buddy saves Lester's life. I thought it was the right time to enhance the interaction between these two characters." Those who have played the longer version will recall that, in the extra scene, Lester repays the favour by saving Buddy's life.

Besides adding content, Chahi was also forced to remove some elements, much to his annoyance. Unsurprisingly, these changes related to the Super Nintendo



» These editor screens, supplied by Chahi, show how easy it was to edit the 2D

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

INFERNAL RUNNER
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1985

FUTURE WARS
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC
YEAR: 1990

HEART OF DARKNESS
SYSTEMS: PLAYSTATION, PC
YEAR: 1998





» An enhanced 3DO version was released in 1994, featuring hand-painted backgrounds and a full music score



» The original version (above), and the censored SNES version, with not a builder's crack anywhere in sight



version. "Nintendo of America refused to include any bloody situation or nudity. I had to remove any evidence of blood, right down to the smallest red pixel. I even had to change the alien saliva colour in some close-ups from pink to green. But the most ridiculous thing was the request to remove the cracks from the alien women's asses in the bath scene! Nintendo wanted to remove three measly pixels that made a tiny little line to make sure it looks like a bathing suit and not a naked person. I just hate this confusion between nudity and pornography."

Petty censorship problems aside, the new scene made for a longer, more revealing adventure. But the game's short length was still called into question. Chahi admits that the abrupt ending didn't help matters. "I think that the unhappiness of playing a short game was amplified quite a lot by the ending sequence. This, unfortunately, disappointed many players, as it's a very unusual ending and not something that many games players had seen before." For those few who have yet to complete *Another World*, the game ends with Buddy and a critically-ill Lester taking to the skies on the back of a winged beast, their destination and future unknown. As Chahi says, many players didn't exactly warm to it, expecting Lester to return to his own world in time for tea and biscuits.

RECURRING DREAM

Thankfully, Lester's adventure is far from over, as a homebrew version of *Another World* was recently released on the Game Boy Advance and a mobile phone port is now available. "The mobile version features retuned gameplay, with enhanced background graphics depending on the phone model," Chahi tells us, before revealing details of a new title, his first since 1998's *Heart Of Darkness*. "I'm also working on an original project, but I can't say anything more about that now…"

With the game now available for new platforms, potentially opening up a whole new audience, we asked Chahi how he thought the game had aged. In particular we wondered how the difficulty level and the instant death scenarios would sit with more modern gamers. "It's true that *Another World* is difficult. When I played it back a year ago, I discovered how frustrating it can be sometimes – and breath-taking at the same time. The trial and error aspect doesn't disturb me though. *Another World* is a game of survival in a hostile world, and it really is about life and death. Death doesn't mean the end of the game, but it is a part of the exploration, a part of the experience. That's why the death sequences are so diversified. To solve many puzzles I recognised that you had to die at least once, and this certainly isn't the philosophy of today's game design. It is a controversial point in *Another World's* design, because it truly serves the emotional side of things and the player's attachment to the characters, but it sometimes has a detrimental effect on the gameplay. Because of this, *Another World* must be considered first as an intense, emotional experience."

Before we let Chahi dive back into his secretive new project, which we can only hope is some kind of spiritual successor to *Another World*, we asked him about the character of Lester. Was this unlikely hero based on anyone in particular? Himself maybe?

"Hmm… well I used myself for the rotoscoping technique, so Lester has my corpulence, but the comparisons stop there, nothing more!"



SMALL WORLD

Another World was ported to the Game Boy Advance in 2004 by Cyril Cogordan, a long time fan of the original game. He initially reverse-engineered the code from the Atari ST version before Chahi became aware of the project and provided him with the original source code. We asked Chahi why the game was released as a free download and not as a commercial product? "Cyril released the game on his website about 18 months ago without permission," he reveals. "He thought *Another World* was abandonware, so I quickly got in touch and told him that he was crazy to do this without knowing if he had the rights or not. He then agreed to remove the download, to the dismay of the GBA community. But as Cyril had done a great job, I thought we'd try to get his version released commercially. I cleared the legal problems and approached different publishers but received little response. We decided not to push the commercial front any further, and the game is now available for free once more." Cogordan's port is available from **www.foxysofts.com**.







» Programmer, designer and artist Eric Chahi spent two years single-handedly creating *Another World*

"NINTENDO OF AMERICA REFUSED TO INCLUDE ANY BLOODY SITUATION. I HAD TO REMOVE ANY EVIDENCE OF BLOOD, RIGHT DOWN TO THE SMALLEST RED PIXEL" ERIC CHAHI

SPECIAL THANKS TO:
Aaron Birch and, of course, Eric Chahi

CYBERNOID

FROM THE GREAT RAFFAELE



- **PUBLISHER:** HEWSON
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC 464
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

HISTORY



For me, Raffaele Cecco is a genius. Not only is he one of the few programmers to really make the CPC sing – no shoddy Spectrum ports here thank you very much – he was also rather adept at blending two totally unrelated genres into a challenging (some would say too challenging) new game.

Cybernoid actually goes one step further, for while it perfectly blends both shooting and puzzle elements, Cecco also found time to throw the odd nod to the platform genre as well. The end result is a kooky blend of hardcore shooting and puzzle-solving, which, while unmercifully tough (hell, even unfair at times), still manages to charm today.

Taking control of your Cybernoid fighter, the aim of the game is relatively straightforward: make your way through some elaborate mazes, while avoiding or destroying the game's many enemies and grabbing as much loot as you can. As with blasters such as *Thrust* and *Asteroids*, your Cybernoid craft's thrust is controlled by just one button: keep it held down to rise, and take your finger off to descend. While not as elegant as the mechanics seen in the aforementioned games, it's perfectly adequate for Cecco's title and after a bit of perseverance you'll soon be well on your way to obtaining the booty quota that's needed for the end of each stage.

Although *Cybernoid* is at heart a straightforward shooter, many of the screens require a fair amount of cerebral planning to get through (the puzzle elements) and some painful, pixel-perfect gaps and timing (the platform elements) to squeeze through. Returning to Cecco's colourful vision – which received a sequel in the same year – reveals that flying through the labyrinth-like levels can still provoke gasps of wonderment (it really is a beautiful game) and screams of frustration when an enemy suddenly appears on top of you as you try and exit a screen. Even so, there's still something strangely hypnotic about *Cybernoid*. Maybe it's that insanely catchy title tune…






AMSTRAD
GT 65 Monitor
AMSTRAD
64K COLOUR PERSONAL COMPUTER

Year Released: 1984

Original Price: £199 with green screen monitor, £299 with colour

Buy it now for: £10 to £25

Associated Magazines: Amtix, Computing With The Amstrad (later known as CPC Computing), Amstrad Computer User (official publication – began life as CPC 464 User, then Amstrad CPC 464 User before changing name when 664 was introduced in 1985), Amstrad Action, CPC Attack – and a host of top fanzines, including Artificial Intelligence, Better Than Life and the biggest of them all, the serious mag WACCI

Why the Amstrad CPC 464 was great… You didn't just own an Amstrad CPC464 – it became an integral part of your life. It was the ace up your sleeve, to be used when someone said: "What's best: the Spectrum or C64?" You could smilingly answer: "Neither! The CPC beats them both." And it did. This underdog of a computer had a few tricks: great graphics, decent sound and so many enthusiastic users who refused to let go when the machine died. CPC owners were proud of their choice and rightly so.



AMSTRAD CPC 464

IN THE EIGHTIES, GAMES WERE PRODUCED FOR THE SPECTRUM AND COMMODORE… AND, OF COURSE, THE AMSTRAD. BUT MANY PEOPLE PAID LITTLE NOTICE TO THE UNDERRATED UNDERDOG THAT WAS THE CPC 464. YET SIR ALAN SUGAR'S 8-BIT ENTRY INTO THE WORLD OF HOME MICROS NEVERTHELESS PROVED TO BE A HIT, AS DAVID CROOKES EXPLAINS



The best things come to those who wait… and with the Amstrad CPC 464, that was certainly the case – when this marvellous machine was launched on April 11, 1984, to more than 400 journalists packed into the Great Hall of London's historic Westminster School, it was commonly agreed it had its work cut out. It was competing against the Spectrum and Commodore 64, but Alan Sugar was confident his technically superior CPC – affectionately codenamed Arnold – would win.

It certainly struck a chord with the press: *The Guardian* called it Amstradivarius, *Personal Computer World* boldly said it was the 'Sinclair Beater', and *Computer News* referred to it as Arthur. *The Grimsby Evening Telegraph* called it the 'Mean Machine', but the *London Evening Standard* went one better: "After the People's Car [the VW Beetle], the People's Computer," it gushed.

Mr Sugar was planning worldwide sales of more than 20 million computers and was keen to shift an initial 100,000 that had been created prior to launch.

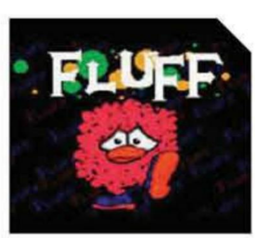
The launch had tried to capture the imagination of journalists by using historical figures ranging from Einstein, Ravel and Archimedes to Monet and Shakespeare, to highlight the various attributes of the CPC. (Shakespeare, for instance, showed how easy writing *Hamlet* would have been with a word-processing package.)

Amstrad was keen to portray the CPC – the Colour Personal Computer – as a 'jack of all trades'. Whereas the Spectrum and C64 were becoming firmly established as decent games machines, the CPC was being marketed as equally good for business.

And Amstrad wanted to get the machines out in the shops by the end of June, with Bill Poel, the general manager of Amsoft, telling *Your Computer*: "I will be prepared to eat one in Trafalgar Square if it's late." He didn't have to. On June 21, the machine was made available to buy

Post-production

When the 464 Plus was scrapped, it heralded the end of this great machine. For a while, commercial companies continued to support the computer, knocking out a host of budget and full-priced titles, including the brilliant *Super Cauldron* and *Prehistorik* in 1993. But as time went on, the market was placed in the hands of hard-core users who set up their own software companies. Among the best was Radical Software, makers of *Fluff and Ball Bearing*. The majority of these games were available on tape (the brilliant *Zap T Balls* was not, being disc only and 128K). But as more and more games began to be released into the public domain for free, it became difficult for 464 users to find people willing to copy the latest homebrew titles onto cassettes. Unless they bought a disc drive, 464 owners found themselves shut off from many of the new wave of games, among the best being *Croco Magneto* and *Les Mings* (typically available by sending a disc, a SAE and 50p).



AMSTRAD CPC 464



» Sir Alan Sugar, now star of BBC2's *The Apprentice*, with more hair at the launch of the CPC 464



» Roland Perry – Amstrad's group technical manager at the time of the CPC 464's launch

at Rumbelows in Edgware Road, London. Around 60 people queued for nearly an hour to get their hands on it, rushing forward when the doors finally opened at 9.30am. By 10.30am, 100 computers had been sold and software was being snapped from the shelves. It was reported that one man had even flown in from Bahrain!

Roland Perry, then Amstrad group technical manager, says: "We were pleased with this initial success. Sir Alan had wanted to create the CPC 464 because he wanted to get into the home computer market. It was the 'latest thing' that was clearly catching on as a mainstream item in the shops and we wanted to be a part of it. To see it sell was very pleasing."

Prior to the launch, Amstrad had been desperate for software, particularly games. The solution was to launch Amsoft at the beginning of 1984, tasked with approaching third-party companies to create 50 CPC games. Some of the games were given away with the CPC 464 for free and these included *Harrier Attack*, *The Galactic Plague*, *Roland On The Ropes*, *Fruit Machine*, *Bridge-It* and *Xanagrams*.

"Games were very important for the 464," continues Perry. "The subsequent CPC 664 and then 6128 with their disc drives started a trend towards small business use with CP/M and word processing and accounting packages, but for me the CPC 464 was 100 per cent a games machine."

The 8-bit CPC was impressive. Amstrad decided to use tapes as the storage medium because they were cheap. It was a good decision – it placed the CPC within the affordable reach of children and so the machine slowly became a strong games contender.

Although programmers wished it had hardware sprites, at the CPC's heart was a Z80 processor running at 4MHz. It had 64K of memory, a built-in tape drive (an external three-inch disc drive was available to buy later), and the choice of colour or green screen monitor.

The computer had three display modes. Mode 0 allowed 16 colours from the 27-strong palette to be shown in low resolution. Mode 1 used up to four colours from 27 in medium resolution. And Mode 2 – which had the highest resolution – was able to show two colours from 27.

The 464 used the General Instruments AY-3-8912 sound chip that outputted in mono via a tiny, four-centimetre, built-in loudspeaker with volume control. It provided three-voice, eight-octave sound capacity. In later 464 models, stereo output was made available through a 3.5mm headphones jack, which could also be linked to external speakers.

While it didn't hit the heights of the C64, the sound capabilities were good enough to allow digital sound samples in games such as *Robin Hood* and *Robocop*. But for the less technically savvy, the machine was striking for other reasons. Aside from the all-important joystick port, the keyboard, computer and tape deck were combined in one unit connected with just two wires to a monitor, which contained the power supply unit. The whole thing was powered by one plug in what proved to be a tidy, simple system, attractive to the public. It also kept manufacturing costs down. But the keyboard itself was



» The CPC was marketed as the all-in-one solution, playing into the hands of the technophobes

more striking. Long and thin, and with the tape deck to the right of the keyboard, it had garish red, green and blue keys.

Perry says: "We wanted the keyboard to look like a 'real computer' – the sort of thing people saw at the airline check-in desk when they went on holiday. The integrated tape deck was created because Amstrad's success had been making integrated consumer electronics like the Hi-Fi, which had nothing extra to buy and no complicated wiring. For this reason we bundled the CPC with a monitor."

Although the Z80 chip powered the CPC, Amstrad initially pondered using a 6502 processor, the same one used in Commodore's Vic-20 and in the Apple II. It was to have 32k of RAM and Microsoft's BASIC. In the end, Locomotive Software, which produced the CPC's BASIC, persuaded Amstrad to try the faster Z80 instead.

"We started the development of the Amstrad by having a basic idea and coming up with an outline spec, then filling in more details as we went along," continues Perry. "Sir Alan was pleased with the end result. Anything he didn't like we changed. I remember him wanting the cursor keys to 'work' at all times, which wasn't how people typically made BASIC interpreter interfaces at the time."

The CPC continued to pick up sales and was even making an impact in the classroom – in November 1984, Sir Keith Joseph, the minister of state for education and science, toured Thorpe Bay High School in Southend, which was the first to have 464s.

But although the 464 sold well in Britain, it became a phenomenon in Europe, particularly in France where it was the best-selling home micro. In Spain it was distributed by Indescorp as the CPC472 (it had an extra 8K of – unusable – RAM to get around a Spanish ruling that computers with 64K or less had to contain a tilde (~) on the keyboard). In Germany, it was sold under Schneider's name, but without the coloured keys.

"We would have been happy to sell 100,000 CPCs and get into the top ten sellers," continues Perry. "But we surpassed our expectations, got to the top of the charts and sold a couple of million. Much of that was because we insisted on distributing the machine in well-known high-street stores rather than solely mail order or in specialist computer stores. It was a complete system, not just a console."

Buoyant sales of the machine meant the vast majority of the major third-party software houses soon supported it. Games produced for the Spectrum and Commodore were created for the CPC, although, because the Spectrum shared the Z80 processor, many initial Amstrad games were lazy Speccy ports. Some of these games were sluggish and jerky and did not take advantage of the four and 16 colour modes nor the hardware scrolling. But when done well, the









CPC more than held its own with colourful graphics, great sound and smooth scrolling.

In 1985, the CPC had its first show, which took place in the autumn at London's Novotel. Not many games software houses turned up – neither, come to that, did Amstrad itself.

But some great games were being released – David Braben's *Elite* made an appearance that Christmas. By this point, Sugar was claiming a 25 per cent market share and he boasted that the 464 was "the machine that everyone knows and loves… reputedly used by a well-known vacuum manufacturer to stock control his cars!"

Leading software houses were also beginning to love the CPC. Nick Alexander, of Virgin Software, which had produced *Sorcery*, said the Amstrad version was the biggest seller of the three platforms it had made the game for. "If you compare the Amstrad with the Spectrum and C64," he said, "I think our programmers' attitude toward it is that it's superior – the leader of the pack."

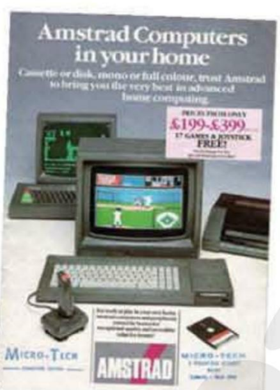
The following year, Infocom announced its acclaimed adventures, including *Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy* and *Zork I, II* and *III*, were at last being released on the CPC.

But in the same year, Amstrad bought its rival, Sinclair, and began to produce the Spectrum, prompting speculation that the CPC 464 would be discontinued. Amstrad denied it would get rid of "a machine that is making us money", though industry observers said the disc-based CPC 6128 was making more cash. But Sugar did say the Sinclair purchase would mean the Spectrum being marketed as a games machine and the Amstrad for more serious stuff.

Such backing of the 464 by Sugar didn't quell speculation about the 464's future – by October, many software houses complained that software sales had slumped and blamed Amstrad, saying it had not produced enough 464s. Some claimed it had stopped production.

It was not the case and as the sales began to pick up again, the 464's golden era came as games were produced by the bucket load and a whole host of peripherals were created, one of the best being the Multiface 2 which allowed gamers to hack into games and input cheat codes that were printed in the mags.





» **Above left:** *Amstrad Action* was the biggest selling CPC magazine – at its height it sold 37,000 copies, easily beating the official *ACU, Amtix, Computing With The Amstrad* and the short-lived, six-issue, *CPC Attack* **Right:** Amstrad begins to change strategy – promoting the disc-based 6128, leaving the 464 in the background



» Games are the order of the day for the 464. If you choose the green screen, Amstrad says, "but still want to play your arcade games in colour – don't worry! There's a power supply and modulator for linking to your colour TV"

Despite rumours abounding that Amstrad would manufacture a 16-bit machine, the 464 continued. (Amstrad did indeed produce a new machine in 1989, however: the flop games-based PC, the Sinclair P200.) The 464 came under threat again in August 1987, when the disc-based Spectrum Plus 3 was launched – meaning that Amstrad had three machines coming in under £300 (Plus 2, Plus 3 and 464) on sale. And in 1988, Amstrad's club for CPC owners was sold off, prompting further speculation.

Instead, the 464 was dusted off and placed into a fresh bundle, adding a TV tuner allowing users to watch television on their monitors, 17 games including *Trivial Pursuit, Roland In Time* and *Scalextrix* (the only fun part of which was designing new tracks), a desk, a clock radio and a terrible joystick. It was the ultimate all-in-one solution.

At the same time, Amstrad posted profits of more than £90 million.In 1990, the 464 ceased production – only to be replaced with the revamped 464 Plus. It was white, with greater width, similar to an Amiga or Atari ST in style, and came with a cartridge port for games that took advantage of a palette of up to 4,026 colours. The coloured keys were banished and the old cardboard edge connectors were replaced with more robust expansion ports. The Z80A processor running at 4MHz remained, as did the 64k. But it benefited from four-channel 16-sound stereo with the addition of Direct Memory Access that allowed music to play without burdening the processor, all aiming to capture the success of the original 464 machine.

The old 464 refused to die, however. Ground-breaking games continued to be released – *Prince Of Persia* in the Summer of 1991 looked so lush, it appeared almost identical to the Atari ST version. With fluid animation and smooth and detailed backgrounds, it was one of the best games ever released for the system.

But with the 16-bit Amiga and Atari ST becoming increasingly popular, the 8-bit technology of the CPC, no matter how spruced up with the cartridge slot, failed to attract enough punters and although sales did rise, it was not enough to save the machine and it was finally, and sadly, discontinued.



Behind the curtain

The East Germans created a CPC 464 clone called the KC Compact. It was around 95 per cent compatible with the Amstrad-made CPCs and could be connected to either a tape machine or external 5.25-inch disc drive (the CPC 664 and 6128 used three-inch discs). Although ruining the Amstrad concept of everything in one box – the KC had an external power supply, a standalone computer/keyboard and used a standard television rather than a dedicated monitor – it still ran BASIC 1.1 and had 64K of RAM, although it used a U880 processor rather than Z80. An extra 64K was added when using the tape or disc drive adaptor. The machine was scrapped shortly after the Berlin wall was pulled down. Over in West Germany at the time, the 464 was being produced by Schneider, which replaced the Amstrad badge on the computer's casing and had Schneider on the boot screen (as well as proper non-cardboard expansion edge connectors).



» A new case and the addition of a cartridge slot – for expensive £30 games – transformed the 464 into the 464 Plus



» This French-coded game became one of the CPC's best public domain titles

PERFECT TEN GAMES



NORTH & SOUTH



SPINDIZZY



TOTAL ECLIPSE



NORTH & SOUTH

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** INFOGRAMES
- » **CREATED BY:** NEW FRONTIER
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** HOSTAGES

***North & South* is a great example of what the CPC could do when it wasn't being overloaded with Spectrum ports.** While Infogrames' classic strategy title obviously can't hope to match the visuals of the impressive 16-bit versions, it's amazing how well it captures the spirit of the original French comic *Les Tuniques Bleues* on which the game is based. Fortunately, the gameplay proves to be just as immersive as the striking visuals and you'll soon find yourself frantically trying to regain as much of your opponent's land as possible while you fight it out with infantry, huge cannons and even mobile forces. Excellent stuff.

THE GUILD OF THIEVES

- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** RAINBIRD
- » **CREATED BY:** MAGNETIC SCROLLS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FISH

There's a selection of great text adventures for the CPC, but it's the wonderful *Guild Of Thieves* we constantly return to. It's a meticulously crafted story, features some beautifully drawn locations and has some extremely devious puzzles to solve. Basically everything you'd expect from creators Magnetic Scrolls. Like *The Pawn* before it, *The Guild Of Thieves* featured a lavish boxset that was filled with plenty of goodies that ranged from a Bank of Kerovnia credit card, to a copy of *What Burglar* magazine and was once again set in Kerovnia. It's definitely a lot tougher, but is a far superior product that will have you scratching your head until the cows come home.

SPINDIZZY

- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ELECTRIC DREAMS
- » **CREATED BY:** PAUL SHIRLEY
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CONFUZION

The simplest ideas are often the best and they don't get much more straightforward than the wonderful *Spindizzy*. All you have to do is guide your spinning top around 386 isometric screens in search of jewels. Sounds simple right? Well no, not really, but that's why it's so great. While many of the jewels are easily placed, they soon start to appear in all sorts of hard-to-reach locations, many of which require real ingenuity to obtain. Later jewels can only be reached by flicking switches, using lifts and even jumping chasms, and that's before you even consider the terrain that becomes increasingly tricky to negotiate the further you progress. Oh, and did we mention you have to collect all these jewels within a strict time limit…?

GRYZOR

- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
- » **CREATED BY:** JOHN BRANDWOOD
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RENEGADE

It's a sad matter of fact, but most Amstrad conversions were a poor third to the often-superior Spectrum and Commodore 64 ports. Every now and then, though, a game came along that totally blew its 8-bit peers away – *Gryzor* is one such game. Not only does it look absolutely stunning (it features similar graphics to Mark Jones' other Ocean hit *Renegade*), it plays like a dream as well. Controls are extremely tight and responsive; the difficulty is just right and there's an array of superb weapons. Indeed, barring a few minor differences (and a big decrease in aesthetics) this is as close to the original game as you could expect an 8-bit to get. A simply amazing game.

TOTAL ECLIPSE

- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** INCENTIVE SOFTWARE
- » **CREATED BY:** MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DRILLER

By the time *Total Eclipse* appeared in 1988, developers Incentive already had two *Freescape* titles under its belt. While there was nothing wrong with the sci-fi settings of *Driller or Darkside*, the familiar setting of Thirties Egypt makes *Total Eclipse* far easier to relate to. It also helps that it's more technically proficient, has superior puzzles and a creepy tone that makes exploring the pyramid extremely atmospheric. A number of play mechanics were introduced and there was a tight two-hour timeframe to complete the game in, which would have been fine if the pyramid itself wasn't so confusing to navigate.



THE GUILD OF THIEVES



GRYZOR

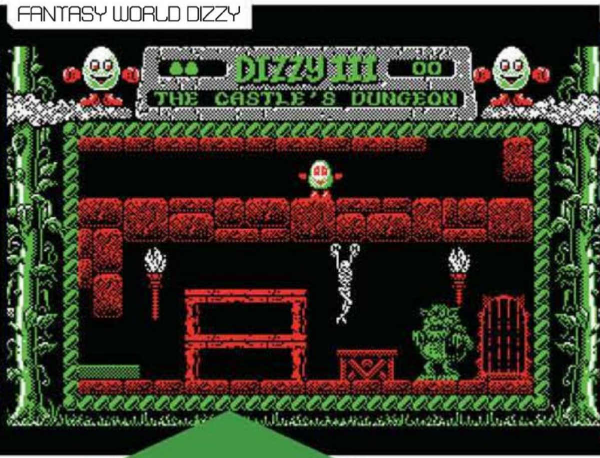


PRINCE OF PERSIA

AMSTRAD CPC 464

It always came a poor third to the Spectrum and C64, but as the following games show, there were plenty of classics available for the 464. We're sure that plenty of you will disagree with our choices listed here, but that's half the fun – get the debate started now!





FANTASY WORLD DIZZY



GET DEXTER

PRINCE OF PERSIA

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHED BY:** DOMARK/BRODERBUND
» **CREATED BY:** BRODERBUND
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MYST

***Prince Of Persia* is quite possibly one of the most striking games to ever appear on Alan Sugar's 8-bit computer.** Released in 1990, it's a true revelation and easily showcases what the CPC can do when it's truly pushed. While the levels look sumptuous, it's the staggering animation on the prince himself that truly impresses. Gameplay is just as good, with the prince perfectly responding to either the press of a joystick or stroke of a key. Who knows? If games like *Prince Of Persia* had appeared at the beginning of the CPC's life (and not god-awful rubbish like *Bridge It*), things may have been quite different.

FANTASY WORLD DIZZY

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** CODEMASTERS
» **CREATED BY:** THE OLIVER TWINS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR

You can't feature an Amstrad top ten without at least one *Dizzy* game, so we've decided to plump for his third adventure that sees the intrepid hero exploring Fantasy World in search of girlfriend Daisy. Fantasy World is a big place, however, and Dizzy has to solve a variety of different puzzles and make his way past several ferocious enemies before he's finally reunited with his loved one. After the difficulty of *Treasure Island Dizzy* (you only got one life), *Fantasy World* is far more enjoyable to play – throw in some superior visuals and great puzzles, and it's easy to see why the lovable character remains so popular.

HEAD OVER HEELS

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** JON RITMAN, BERNIE DRUMMOND
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BATMAN

We've already featured Drummond and Ritman's classic in the Spectrum Perfect Ten Games, but we love it so much we had to include it here as well. Like *Get Dexter*, it's one of the finest Isometric adventures that the Amstrad (or any other machine for that matter) has to offer, and remains as fresh as ever. Level design is near perfect, the interaction between the two characters is a stroke of genius and Drummond's creations feature more character in a few pixels than a dozen of today's gaming heroes can muster. One of the best adventures ever made.

GET DEXTER

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** PSS/ERE
» **CREATED BY:** ERE INFORMATIQUE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PACIFIC

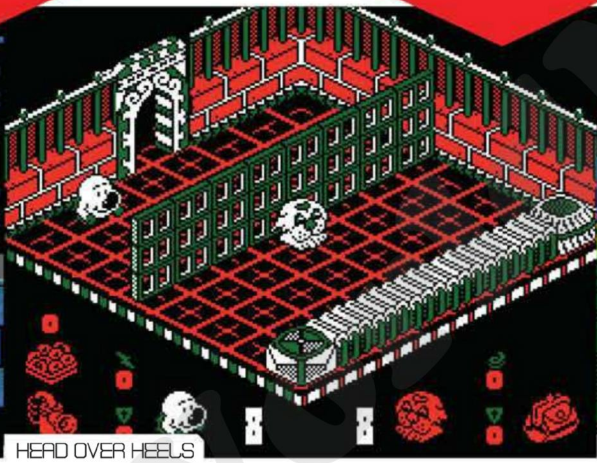
Produced by French company ERE Informatique in 1986, *Get Dexter/Crafton & Xunk* really showed off the CPC's power by injecting both originality and humour into the isometric adventure, easily surpassing anything that Ultimate had produced on the CPC. *Get Dexter*'s graphics are superbly defined and colourful with it, and your character can interact with virtually everything on screen making it a really interactive experience. The playability is finely balanced between being frustratingly difficult and enormously enjoyable, the perfect learning curve for avid gamers. Visually stunning, *Get Dexter* is a true CPC classic, and we'd highly recommend it to anyone.

CHASE H.Q.

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** JON O'BRIEN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** NORTH STAR

On an unexpanded CPC 464, the digitised classic line delivered by your boisterous partner – "Let's Go, Mr Driver" – could not be heard. But that didn't detract from the gameplay of what was certainly a legendary CPC arcade conversion by Ocean. If there was one complaint about this game, it was that it got your adrenaline pumping to the nth degree, making your palms sweaty as you closed in on the bad guy with the clock ticking perilously close to 'Game Over', and smoke pouring from beneath your tyres.The graphics were colourful and chunky, the speed, particularly when pressing the turbo, was surprisingly fast. Few games could match the pace, or indeed the action, of this game.





HEAD OVER HEELS



CHASE H.Q.



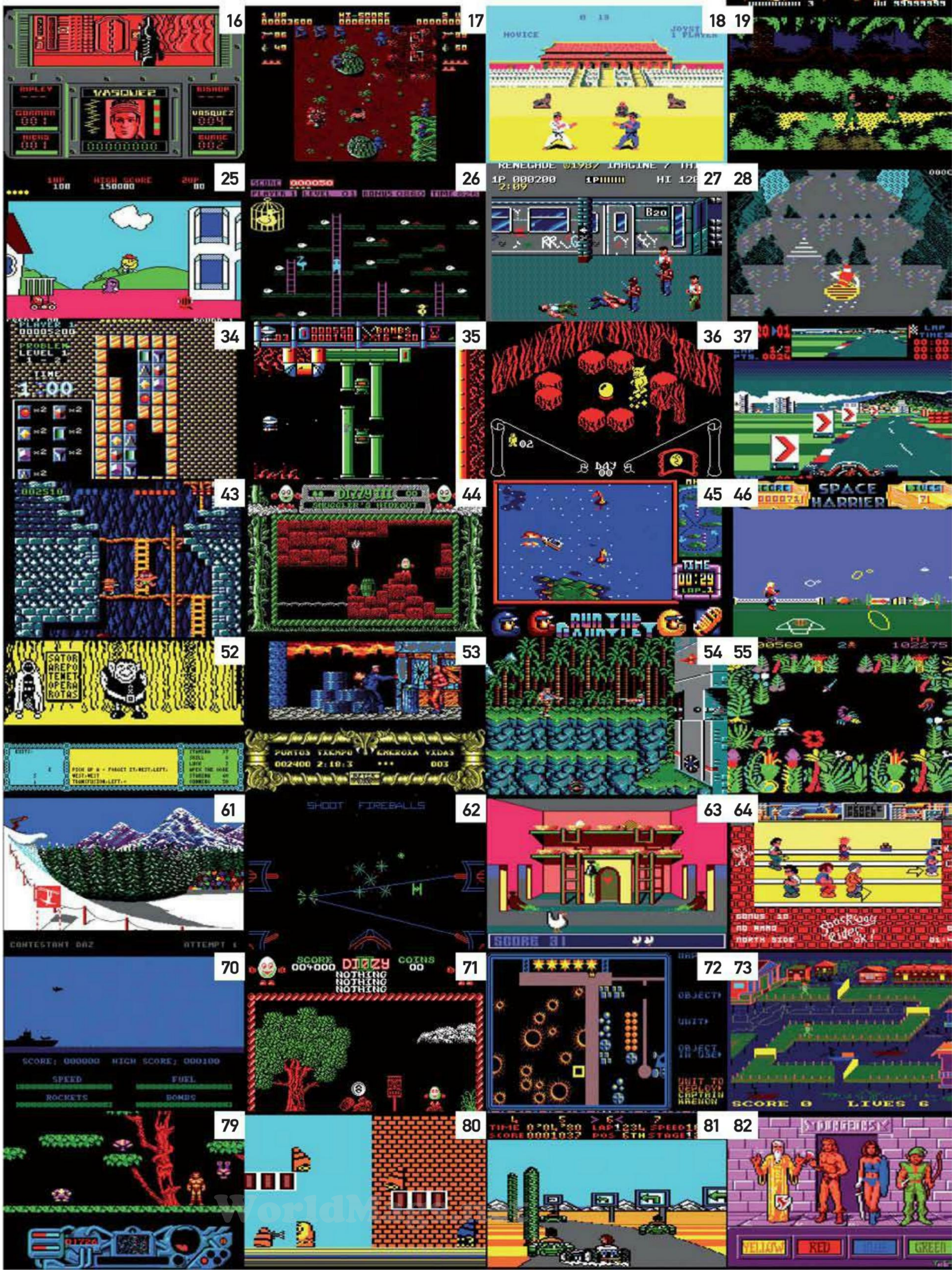




AMSTRAD CPC 464 and the rest...

Yes, it had its fair share of detractors, but there were plenty of great games to love on the Amstrad CPC 464, and what's more, many of them weren't actually Spectrum conversions.

01 ADVANCED PINBALL SIMULATOR
02 RAMPAGE
03 ZYNAPS
04 DAN DARE III: THE ESCAPE
05 PIPE MANIA
06 DRILLER
07 RAINBOW ISLANDS
08 KUNG FU MASTER
09 SPINDIZZY
10 MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS
11 DIZZY
12 MATCH DAY II
13 BARBARIAN
14 JET SET WILLY
15 TRAILBLAZER
16 ALIENS
17 IKARI WARRIORS
18 WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
19 PLATOON
20 UN SQUADRON
21 CRAFTON & XUNK
22 KANE
23 BACTRON
24 TAPPER
25 PAC-LAND
26 CHUCKIE EGG
27 RENEGADE
28 ESCAPE FROM SINGE'S CASTLE
29 POSTMAN PAT 3
30 FANTASTIC VOYAGE
31 PRINCE OF PERSIA
32 COMMANDO
33 JACK THE NIPPER
34 PUZZNIC
35 CYBERNOID
36 KNIGHT LORE
37 SUPER MONACO GRAND PRIX
38 RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II
39 IK+
40 CHASE HQ
41 BMX SIMULATOR
42 HOW TO BE A COMPLETE BASTARD
43 RICK DANGEROUS
44 FANTASY WORLD DIZZY
45 RUN THE GAUNTLET
46 SPACE HARRIER
47 PING PONG
48 GAME OVER
49 CASTLE MASTER
50 NEBULUS
51 SOLOMON'S KEY
52 HEAVY ON THE MAGIC
53 AFTER THE WAR
54 GRYZOR
55 SABRE WULF
56 OH MUMMY
57 FORGOTTEN WORLDS
58 BAT MAN
59 ROLAND ON THE ROPES
60 TURBO OUTRUN
61 WINTER GAMES
62 STAR WARS
63 CHICKEN CHASE
64 SHOCKWAY RIDER
65 ALIEN 8
66 USAGI YOJIMBO
67 ROBIN HOOD
68 HEAD OVER HEELS
69 DELIVERANCE: STORMLORD 2
70 HARRIER ATTACK
71 TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY
72 REBELSTAR
73 BRIDGE IT
74 GHOSTBUSTERS
75 ROBOCOP
76 SAVAGE
77 SKWEEK
78 TARGET: RENEGADE
79 THE SCARED ARMOR OF ANTIRIAD
80 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
81 POWER DRIFT
82 GAUNTLET II
83 MERCS
84 RICK DANGEROUS II
85 1942
86 FRUIT MACHINE SIMULATOR
87 OPERATION WOLF





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DIZZY
BARBARIAN
RAMBO
Castle Master
ROBIN HOOD
SCORE 002100 HEALTH 99
MONITORING EQUIPMENT:
HOW TO BE A COMPLETE BASTARD
SAVAGE
CASH-BASH

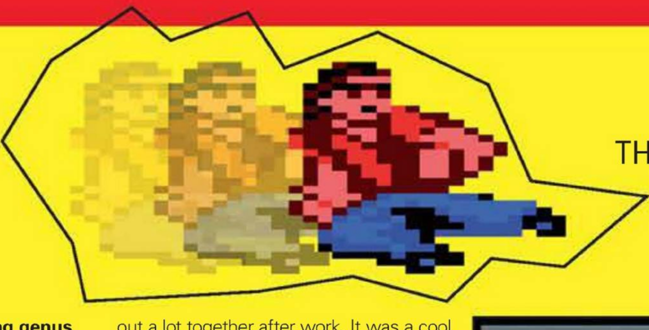
THE MAKING OF...

TARGET: RENEGADE

Called back into 8-bit-only action by industry legend Ocean, Technos' hot-blooded bad boy, the Renegade, once again made the streets unsafe for roaming gangs in the classic 1988 beat-'em-update, Target: Renegade. Programmer Mike Lamb and Ocean's head of development, Gary Bracey, told us about their work on the ass-kickin' in-house sequel



"WHEN A GAME IS THIS WELL DESIGNED, THE PLAYER IS UNAWARE THAT ANY DEPTH OF EFFORT WAS EVER MADE" MIKE LAMB



Although the fighting genus appears, superficially, to be constructed from a limited extraction, successfully creating a healthy pedigree is no small task. It requires an oblique ingenuity to effectively repackage the same, well-trodden premise into a structure that will appeal to stalwart fans.

When Technos' perennial gang-fighting extravaganza, *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-Kun* was released, the slick veneer made it instantly accessible to the jaded Japanese arcade goer. Its quality found in the surplus of well-conceived designs and back-breaking effort from the developers, with no call for players to add their own strength to the game's already muscular whipping arm. The hard work was done, and all that was left was to enjoy the game. Likewise, when the machine left its native shores, an extra round of laborious redesign was applied to transform the game into *Renegade*, infusing the same, culturally relevant undercurrent that brought about its much deserved merit.

Renegade's hugely successful 8-bit conversion then marked a turning point in the suffering reputation of renowned software house, Ocean. Mike Lamb, game designer and programmer of *Renegade* (and its continuation), told us about his work-life on the run up to the smash sequel.

"When I first got to Ocean, it had a reputation for buying a big licence and making a crap job of the game. Gary Bracey, the development manager, had been hired and told to get some good people in to turn things around. Most of us were new to Manchester, so we hung out a lot together after work. It was a cool group. Manchester in the Eighties was a very happening place.

There was a fair bit of competition among the programmers to do one better than the next guy and I think it really helped the games. Gradually Ocean's reputation turned around and I'd say, for the most part, we all felt pretty good about what we were doing," remembers Lamb.

When granted the freedom to build on his hugely successful conversion of the original coin-op, Lamb and his team followed the example set by the Japanese by employing the same diligent, yet transparent, background industry when expanding the world of the vengeful vigilante.

The two player co-operative beat-'em-up was at its zenith, and was a natural progression which the 8-bit fighting fans were crying out to see on their home machines. Gary Bracey told us about the evolution of the franchise.

"Ocean was known predominantly for conversions and movie licences. It was rare to create a totally original game in-house, and that was very satisfying to everyone involved. It was my job at the time to choose the developers/teams and approve design concepts and graphics. However, the developers and artists we had working on *Target: Renegade* were some of the best in the business and I knew the result would be excellent. These were not people you had to stand watch over every hour. They were pretty much given the freedom to invent the game from the ground up."

Ocean had been outbid for the much-anticipated *Double Dragon* licence which, when it arrived from Melbourne House, cast an insipid pall over its majestic arcade ancestor. The *Renegade* follow-up couldn't have come at a better time to counterbalance *Double Dragon*'s categorical failure. Lamb was a fan of Technos' arcade half-sequel to *Renegade*, and drew on its prowess when updating his original conversion.

"Rather cleverly, Ocean had written the rights to make a sequel to *Renegade* into the original licensing contract. *Renegade* had been very well received and Ocean wanted to cash in. It got a copy of the arcade *Double Dragon* game and we all got to work.

We had a couple of preliminary meetings to work out what the levels were going to be and what characters would be in them. The game itself wasn't



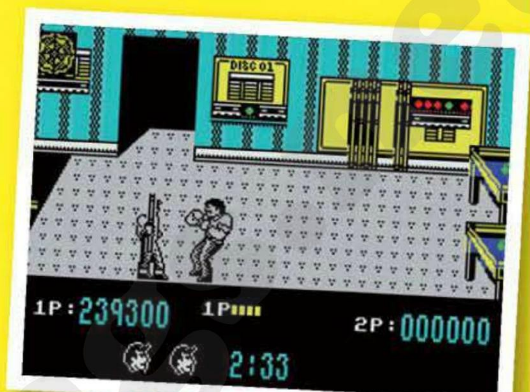
» The C64's *Renegade* bore a striking resemblance to the new look, long-haired Vietnam vet from 1988's *Rambo 3*

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN/IMAGINE
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** 'NOWT





» Mr Big – the end boss and cheeky likeness of Ocean's MD, Jon Woods



» As far as Mike Lamb can remember, 'Rene' was graphic artist Dawn Drake's boyfriend



» In 1990, Taito released an NES version, which looked more akin to *Double Dragon*

THE MAKING OF...

TARGET: RENEGADE





» That's using your head



» Burying the hatchet with the gang in the park. Let's all be friends, eh?

RIGHT ON TARGET

Mike Lamb tells us which version of *Target: Renegade* he thought hit the gold. "The Spectrum was definitely my favourite. When we made *Target: Renegade*, in order to make the game better we were going to have to use a full 48k per level. 128k machines were more popular by then, but in order to accommodate 48k owners, we wanted to make the levels longer so the tape loading wouldn't be so intrusive. After Christmas, Dawn and I got to work on the Amstrad version. I came up with an idea to use four colour sprites to save memory. It was a good idea technically, but although the game was fun to play, the graphics suffered in comparison to the original *Renegade*. The C64 hardware didn't really suit a game like *Target: Renegade*. The limitation on how many sprites you could fit on a scan line restricted what could be done in terms of gameplay a lot."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BATMAN – THE MOVIE
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, C64 & ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987

ARKANOID
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI 8-BIT, C64 & ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987

COMBAT SCHOOL
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, C64 & ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987



"IT WAS BASICALLY GOING THROUGH VARIOUS LANDSCAPES BEATING THE CRAP OUT OF EVERYBODY" MIKE LAMB

particularly original in design. We copied the two-player idea and weapons from *Double Dragon*. There wasn't a whole a lot of back story – it was basically going through various landscapes beating the crap out of everybody.

Jon Woods (Ocean's MD) came up with the idea of using a telephone at the end of each level. "I guess he'd been watching *Dirty Harry*," laughs Lamb, modestly making light of his impressive achievement.

Despite Lamb's assertions that *Target: Renegade* was not an original idea, the fact remains that its timing was impeccable, and he and his team had created a game that resonated profoundly with the starving beat-'em-up fraternity. There were no flashy hot-rods in the protagonist's garage, and no ornate super-villain hideouts to penetrate. *Renegade*'s journey was through a deprived inner-city scenario; an axiom of Eighties social decay that players not only identified with, but also lived on, walked through and suffered everyday.

This candid snapshot of urban life not only served to draw players into the *Renegade*'s world (or more accurately, place him in theirs), but delivered a two-dimensional realisation of a guttural, often repressed – and yes, somewhat juvenile – fantasy harboured by every beat-'em-up fan; the fearless ability to answer the criminal class in kind. The mean streets of Scumville that so expressively reflected recession-fraught Britain was a place where the player no longer had to fear the hostile gangs who patrolled local parks, or avoid the shadowed threat of the multi-storey car park. Any aggression could be met with an equally adept malevolence, the failure of law and order replaced by the brutal, dispassionate justice of an urban-jungle.

"The design of the characters and backgrounds was mostly the work of the artists. Ron Fowles, the Spectrum *Renegade* artist, had left and I was lucky enough to work with Dawn Drake. Martin MacDonald (the C64 artist) and Dawn collaborated a good deal on the graphics. I can't exactly remember who came up with what. The gameplay was mostly left to me, but Dawn and Martin were good about taking suggestions and I listened to their ideas too. Martin made the boss in the pool hall a rather good caricature of Jon Woods (the Ocean boss). We didn't have a lot of contact with him and everybody was a little scared of him. He was cool about it though," Lamb explains about the construction of the *Renegade*'s hometown and its disreputable occupants.

He continues, "They came up with pretty much all the characters. Dave Collier wrote the C64 version, and most of the gameplay that I didn't come up with came from Dawn and Martin. Gary Bracey was good for suggestions."

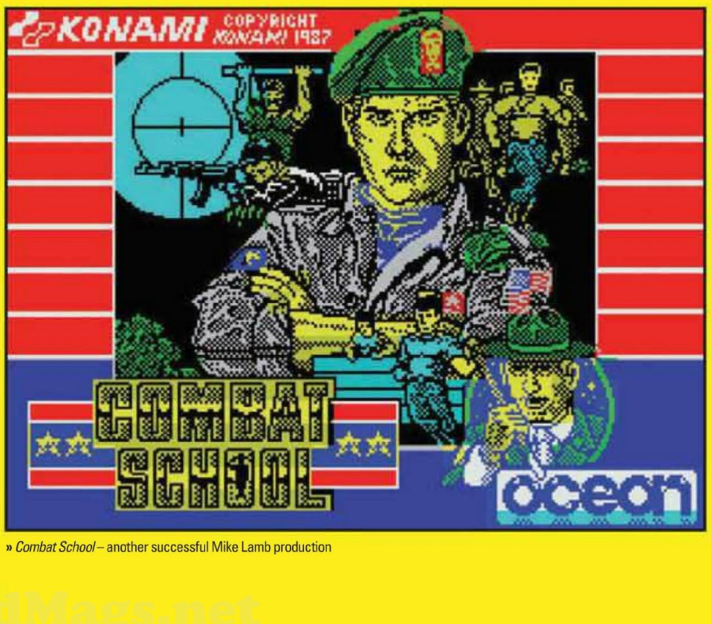
Bracey tells us about his involvement in realising the inspired project: "Unlike today, the people who designed the games were the same people who developed them – both programming and graphics. Therefore, they had perfect knowledge of the respective restrictions of the platforms and how much those limitations could be stretched.

As for the title, I think I may have come up with that one. I don't recall there being any other serious suggestions." Bracey's name for the sequel trips lightly off the tongue after almost 20 years of repetition, but if we look closely, it serves the critical post a title must fulfil rather adroitly.

The back story to the original was built around the kidnapping of a vengeful malcontent's girlfriend, and his merciless retribution. The sequel's tale, as dictated

» His work done, the C64 *Renegade* stopped off for a quick one in the bar he just wreaked. Arseholing thugs is thirsty work, you know





» *Combat School* – another successful Mike Lamb production



» The Amstrad version of *Target: Renegade* in all its colourful glory



by the concise title, tells a story of vengeance moving in the opposite direction. The disgraced criminal hordes must reclaim their dubious honour by defeating the Renegade once and for all; he (and his twin) are the sole target of the gang's violent malice, with no ulterior intentions to destroying our hero. Summarising an entire back story into a two word title is immensely difficult, but vitally important when it comes to selling the game to the correct, window shopping audience. Bracey's choice accomplished this perfectly.

Much of what made *Renegade* popular wasn't found in *Double Dragon*, but this direct sequel made a special effort to retain the characteristic style that permeated the raw, corrosive, underworld texture of the original. The reckless bikers, the unscrupulous gunman, the treacherous streetwalkers and the twisted pain junkies were all back, ready to turn their sadistic talents on anyone who passed their way. Likewise, the *Renegade*'s own techniques returned to an unrefined street style rather than a restrained martial system; self-taught and without clemency, the ultimate 'style of no style'. Just because an enemy lay unconscious after being kicked off a moving motorbike didn't make them any less of a target, and neither was a sledgehammer an unfair adversary to fragile ribs. A properly realised differentiation between a rescue mission and a desperate battle for survival is one of the fundamental, veiled nuances that great beat-'em-ups use to stand out from the crowd, and *Target: Renegade* can lay claim to providing a text book example of how this was done.



» The C64 version may have impressed with its chunky visuals, but the lack of a second player was unforgiveable

Gary Bracey confirms that the reputation of the original classic was always a sincere consideration when developing its sequel: "We felt that *Renegade* was such a huge and unexpected hit that we should have another go, this time being unfettered by the restrictions of producing a faithful conversion, while keeping to the spirit – and control – of the original." And so they did – marking another successful revolution in Ocean's illustrious career, and a seminal moment in home computing and beat-'em-up history.

"During the 8-bit era, a lot of games weren't technically very well written. We always prided ourselves at Ocean on keeping the frame-rate up and squeezing as much as we could from the hardware. If something worked well first time, like *Target: Renegade*, it was a sure hit," explains Lamb.



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Renegade
Renegade 3: The Final Chapter

A defining moment in 8-bit brutality, *Target: Renegade* was a triumph of dedicated enterprise over commercial pandering, providing the raw meat that fans of the genre wanted, without the flavourless dilution required for general appeal. When a game is this well designed, the player is unaware that any depth of effort was ever made; they will simple love playing it, without questioning why.



» Jet Li's 2004 game *Rise To Honour* is a decent-ish update on the *Renegade* concept. Don't try this at home (try it outside)



» A pimp and his bitches out for a peaceful stroll through the neighbourhood. We'll soon put a stop to that…

WOLF IN LAMB'S CLOTHING

Mike Lamb's father was a lecturer and gave him a book to learn BASIC on the resident Commodore PET at an early age. Having written a couple of games for the machine, he first found competition when the ZX Spectrum was released and a schoolmate wrote *Galaxians* for Artic Computing.

Lamb bought a Spectrum. He was attending Cambridge and made a pool game inspired by an arcade machine. CDS Microsystems picked up his game in 1983, and soon commissioned a snooker game, featuring Steve Davis.

After university, Lamb applied for a job at Ocean, where he created the classic conversions of *Renegade*, *Target: Renegade*, *Arkanoid*, *Batman – The Movie*, *Combat School* and more.

He moved to California to found a development company with John Brandwood, the Amstrad *Renegade* programmer. Retired in Miami, Lamb spends his time playing online poker, and despite some success, he's glad he doesn't have to live on his winnings!



"AN AXIOM OF EIGHTIES SOCIAL DECAY THAT PLAYERS NOT ONLY IDENTIFIED WITH, BUT ALSO LIVED ON, WALKED THROUGH AND SUFFERED EVERYDAY"



THE CLASSIC GAME

THE CLASSIC GAME

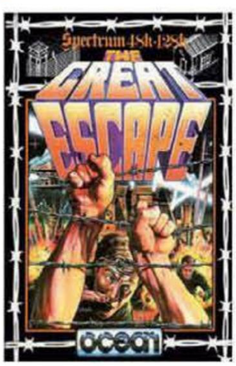
THE GREAT ESCAPE

On its release the Spectrum magazines showered The Great Escape with medals – a Crash Smash, a Sinclair User Classic and a Your Sinclair Megagame. High honours indeed, but just how groundbreaking was the game? Retro Gamer goes under the fence to find out

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
» **DEVELOPER:** DENTON DESIGNS
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



When Ocean announced in 1986 that it was releasing a game based on the classic World War II film *The Great Escape* it hardly called for a victory salute (except possibly of the one-fingered variety). After all, Ocean had already dragged to market some appalling licensed products – *Street Hawk* and *Knight Rider* spring to mind – so there was every chance it'd make a mess of the much-loved movie.

Thankfully it wasn't to be, as the game was not a product of Ocean's in-house production line. Instead it was created by Denton Designs, the highly respected team behind *Shadowfire, Frankie Goes to Hollywood* and the Spectrum version of *Spy Hunter*. And it was merely "inspired" by the movie rather than based directly on it, so there was no Charlie Bronson digging tunnels or Steve McQueen jumping over fences on a motorbike. Denton took the basic plot of a gutsy prisoner caged in a German POW camp and built around it one the 8-bit era's most memorable titles.

Rather than a series of levels, *The Great Escape* features a single stage (the camp), which runs on a strict daily routine. To view the monotony of camp life you don't have to do anything; relinquish the controls and your character will go about his daily business. He'll get out of bed when prompted, then attend morning roll call in front of the German officers, before reporting to the canteen for breakfast. In the afternoon the



» This is your humble abode, complete with bed, table and secret tunnel entrance. Very handy that…

THEY SAID:

"THE GREAT ESCAPE IS DEFINITELY ONE OF THE BEST GAMES EVER SEEN ON THE SPECTRUM"

CRASH ISSUE 35



prisoners are allowed time in the exercise yard, before attending evening roll call and returning to their huts.

In the privacy of your hut you can start to explore your surroundings. There's a stove in the corner, which, when pushed aside reveals a secret tunnel. It's too dark to explore though – you need a torch or something similar. There's nothing else here, so you step outside, taking care not to get caught by the search light that sweeps the camp at night, and sneak into the neighbouring hut. There are no secret tunnels here, but you do find a bottle of poison. Maybe you could use that to deal with the dogs guarding the perimeter fence? For now, though, you need to get some shut-eye to keep your morale up.

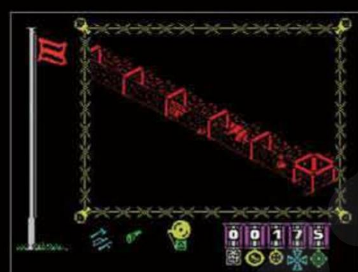
When the next day dawns you begin to suss out your surroundings. After roll call, instead of going straight to the canteen, you try a couple of nearby doors. One is locked (need to find a key…), but the other is open, leading to a small room containing the Red Cross parcel. One of these arrives each morning and it's used by the allies to sneak items into the camp. On day one it contains a rather pointless bag of coins, but on day two a pair of wire cutters are waiting for you. That's more like it. Other items are hidden around the camp, including: a torch, so you can see where you're going in the tunnels; a spade, just the job for unblocking a caved-in tunnel; a useful lock-pick; and best of all, a German uniform which lets you explore restricted areas without arousing suspicion.

With what seems like 101 useful items for escaping a prison camp at your disposal, you'd think you'd be on your way back to dear old Blightly by the end of day two. But, naturally, it's not that simple. There are the German guards to contend with for a start. They patrol set routes and operate on a basic line-of-sight principle, so it's possible to sneak past them when they turn away. It's certainly not an exact science, however, and there's a degree of randomness about being caught, which only serves to increase the tension. There's arguably nothing more heart-stopping in any 8-bit game than trying to pick a lock or cut a hole in a fence (which takes around ten seconds) while the alarm bell is blaring and the guards are after your blood.

If you do get caught, the items you're carrying will be confiscated and you'll spend a morale-sapping night in solitary. And if your morale hits rock bottom, control is relinquished and your character will shuffle around the camp like a zombie, following the daily routine. Busting out really is the only option and there are several avenues of escape, all of which require careful planning and the correct equipment. A bit of good fortune comes in handy too.

The Great Escape's non-linear gameplay was a breath of fresh air back in 1986, particularly in this genre, and the game's isometric graphical style was just as innovative. For the camp's interiors the game adopts a familiar static approach, much like Ultimate's 3D adventures, but outside the player is treated to a scrolling isometric view. Being able to explore the camp without having to flick between multiple screens really builds a sense of 'being there' in a perfectly realised location. The speed at which the viewpoint scrolls is also impressive, at least on the original Spectrum version (the Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC ports are sluggish in comparison). Presentation is also spot on, with your morale depicted by a flag, which rises and falls, and your score displayed as a row of war medals.

Like the film on which the game is not based (it's "inspired", remember), *The Great Escape* is an 8-bit classic that has stood the test of time. Even if you've managed to escape several times before, getting the right gear together and breaking free is still a thrilling experience. Okay, so if you're playing via emulation then you'll want to crank up the speed a little, but the sense of atmosphere and the spirit of adventure remain tangible to this day.



» The tunnel is not just a sneaky way of travelling around camp, as it's also a great place to hide goodies from the German guards



» It's a good job there was no CCTV, otherwise you'd end up in the German version of *When Good Prisoners Go Bad*



» When you're caught in the spotlight the guards will be attracted like moths around a light bulb. Get back to your hut quick!

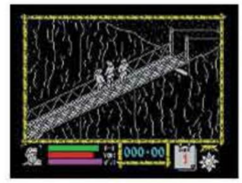
"THE GREAT ESCAPE'S NON-LINEAR GAMEPLAY WAS A BREATH OF FRESH AIR BACK IN 1986, PARTICULARLY IN THIS GENRE AND THE GAME'S ISOMETRIC GRAPHICAL STYLE WAS JUST AS INNOVATIVE"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SHADOWFIRE
SPECTRUM/AMSTRAD/C64 (1985)

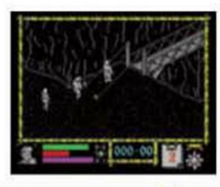
FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
SPECTRUM/AMSTRAD/C64 (1985)

WHERE TIME STOOD STILL
SPECTRUM/PC-DOS/ATARI ST (1988)



TURN BACK TIME

Following the success of *The Great Escape*, Denton began work on a follow-up that would utilise the same isometric graphics system but feature a completely new scenario. The result was *Where Time Stood Still*, a sprawling adventure for the Spectrum 128k that took place in a primitive world, pitting a party of plane crash survivors against cannibals, carnivorous animals and various other things that wanted to eat you. This pseudo-sequel is much more linear than *The Great Escape* – you simply have to guide the party from A to B – but there is an emphasis on teamwork and resource management, as you have to switch control between the four characters to solve a series of tricky puzzles. *WTSS* is an epic adventure and a perfect companion piece to *The Great Escape*. It's kind of fitting that the staff at Denton were involved in Imagine's infamous 'mega-games', because with *WTSS* they ultimately created a game that truly deserves that title.





THE DEFINITIVE BUBBLE BOBBLE

IN HIS MOST AMBITIOUS UNDERTAKING YET, THE DEFINITIVE STUART CAMPBELL ATTEMPTS TO CLEAR UP ONCE AND FOR ALL THE UNHOLY MESS THAT IS TAITO'S LEGENDARY TALE OF TINY DINOSAURS AND THEIR KIDNAP-PRONE FAMILY. HOLD ON TO YOUR (BOBBLE) HATS

Despite its unassuming appearance, *Bubble Bobble* is one of the giants of videogaming. It's doubtful that when the original arcade game was released in 1986, anyone imagined that 20 years later it'd be one of the most enduring, successful, recognised and loved brands in the whole wide world of gaming. And yet it is, and that it should have achieved this status while being so hideously abused by its creators and owners makes the story even more impressive.

Rarely can a series ever have been in such need of a continuity wrangler as *Bubble Bobble*. For example, here's a quick trivia quiz – which of these games is the sequel to *Bubble Bobble*? Is it *Super Bubble Bobble*? Or is it *The Story Of Bubble Bobble 2?* Maybe it's the arcade game *Bubble Bobble 2* – or could it be *Rainbow Islands*, whose UK box calls it *Bubble Bobble 2* and whose US box calls it *Bubble Bobble Sequel*? Is it one of the two different games with different storylines, but which are both called *Bubble Bobble Part 2*? Or could it be another game entirely? That's just one of the questions that's already making your correspondent regret taking on this feature, and we haven't even started yet.

Twenty years ago, when Taito released a 100-level single-screen cartoon platform game into the arcades with little fanfare other than the opening screen promising "It is beginning of a fantastic story!!", they didn't know how right they were. Let's tell that story now!



1986
BUBBLE BOBBLE (ARCADE)

Bubble Bobble is one of the most charming videogames ever created, with its bright colours, jaunty music and simple single-screen gameplay. However, the key to its success is the amount of depth to the game. Contrary to impressions, nothing happens at random and discovering all the hidden mechanisms and tricks kept arcade-goers busy for months. It also helped that the basic graphics made a wealth of homeports easy – computers like the Spectrum could manage an accurate rendition just months after it hit the arcades, and even caveman machines like the Apple 2 could have a go.

SUPER BUBBLE BOBBLE (ARCADE)
After the Japanese release, the US market saw a different *Bubble Bobble* released on licence by a company called Romstar, which offered players a Normal Game or Super Game. The Super Game is a mode that can be unlocked in any *Bubble Bobble* coin-op, via the use of a code that's revealed once the player beats the normal game. It features the same levels, but is inhabited by different monsters (for example, the first few levels are occupied by fire-breathing Incendos rather than the timid and unscary Benzos) and is considerably harder. You have to beat the Super Game (in two-player mode, at that) to get the 'True And Happy Ending' to *Bubble Bobble*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The recent *Taito Legends Volume 1* for PC, Xbox and PS2. Interestingly, it apparently runs a MAME-style emulated version of the arcade ROM (it has the 'Nomal' spelling mistake if you unlock the Super Game), as Taito managed to lose the original source code for the game in 1996 and has never found it again.



» It's the same old Level 3, but with considerably more ferocious enemies than you'd expect there

1987
FINAL BUBBLE BOBBLE (SEGA MASTER SYSTEM)

The stupendously inaptly named Master System version of *Bubble Bobble* was ostensibly a straight port (the 'Final' prefix was only used in Japan), but in fact there's far more to it than that. For a start it has twice as many levels (200 in total, though that's basically achieved by running Normal Game and Super Game consecutively, so most levels appear twice), but there are also significant gameplay changes too, with new pick-ups, new secret rooms and special items to collect, as well as an excellent new comedy plot and ending involving our heroes interrupting a double wedding. You get passwords for every level to help you out, and *Final Bubble Bobble* is widely thought of as the best of all the home versions of *Bubble Bobble*, recreating almost all of the secret tricks and tactics of the original (which not all of the home ports bothered with), as well as adding the extra stuff.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The SMS emulator Meka.



» This new level starts off the second half of your mammoth task

1987
RAINBOW ISLANDS (ARCADE)

Subtitled *The Story Of Bubble Bobble 2* (keep that fact in your head, it'll be important later), *Rainbow Islands* is one of the greatest videogames of all time. Taking the *Bubble Bobble* blueprint and building massively on it (while not very similar at first glance, the two titles are structured almost identically), *Rainbow Islands* came up with a much more sophisticated and varied game with a hugely compelling climb-up-and-get-knocked-down central mechanic. Gorgeous, eye-searingly bright graphics and an insanely chirpy rendition of *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* made *Rainbow Islands* the cutest, happiest game in the world, but one coupled with a fearsome level of challenge that kept battle-scarred hardcore players hooked as well – as with *Bubble Bobble*, it'll take you weeks and weeks of intense play to figure out the secrets, properly master the game and see the 'true' ending.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The only way to fully experience original arcade *Rainbow Islands* at home is in MAME. The otherwise-superb Amiga conversion misses out the three secret islands and their various hidden power-ups; the Mega Drive one does weird things to the palette and inexplicably restricts the height of your jump; the PC Engine CD one has irritating disc-access pauses (but is overall the best home port); and the *Taito Legends*' version has butchered the music with half the channels missing (for a clue as to why, see the 1991 NES/Master system entry).



» *Rainbow Islands* was also one of the pioneers of Taito's fondness for referencing its previous titles in other games – one of the seven *Rainbow Islands* is entirely themed on *Arkanoid*, and there are three secret ones based on *Darius*, *The Fairyland Story* and *Bubble Bobble* (pictured here)

HOW MANY BUBBLE BOBBLES MAKE TWO?

So, have we answered the question in the intro? Which is the real *Bubble Bobble* sequel? In plot terms, here's the nearest we can get to a chronological ordering of the relevant games.

1 *Bubble Memories: The Story Of Bubble Bobble 3* – since Bubby and Bobby are young boys in the intro, it can only take place before the events of ***Bubble Bobble***, and be some sort of flashback game.

2 *Bubble Bobble Part 2* NES version – since both brothers are dinosaurs, this can only be some sort of 'interlude' in the main game.

3 *Final Bubble Bobble* – since it clearly contains events earlier than, and not seen in, the original *Bubble Bobble*.

4 *Bubble Bobble* – since there's no actual mention of them being turned into dinosaurs – they're already dinosaurs, so it must come after the transformation depicted in *Memories*.

5 *Super Bubble Bobble* – since you don't get the true and happy ending until you've played through normal *Bubble Bobble* first.



6 *Rainbow Islands: Bubble Bobble 2* – as Bubby and Bobby are humans.

7 *Parasol Stars: The Story Of Bubble Bobble 3* aka *The Story Of Rainbow Islands 2* – since they're still human, and the parasols were their reward for saving the Rainbow Islands.

8 *Rainbow Islands* NES version: *The Story Of Bubble Bobble 2* – since logically it must take place on 'rebuilt' Rainbow Islands, after their partial sinking in the previous game.

9 *Rainbow Islands* GBC version – which really ought to be called *Rainbow Islands 2* since the storyline acknowledges that it takes place after the previous *Rainbow Islands*.



10 *Bubble Bobble* Game Boy version – as one of the brothers is in human form and the other one is a dinosaur, something must have happened since the second *Rainbow Islands*.

11 *Classic Bubble Bobble* – um, they're both dinosaurs again, so, um, evidently Bub got the wrong Moon Water and had to do his quest over again, like in *Super Bubble Bobble*.

12 *Bubble Bobble Jr* aka *Bubble Bobble Part 2* – and when he gets back, everyone's been kidnapped by King Skall. Bummer.

13 *Bubble Bobble 2* aka *Bubble Symphony* – since evidently Bub and Bob were returned to their human forms again at some point, so that they could father the 'new generation' of human children, before Hyper Drunk turned everyone into dinosaurs again.

So, in conclusion: the first arcade *Bubble Bobble* is really *Bubble Bobble 4* (in the same way that the first *Star Wars* is really *Episode IV*), the coin-op *Bubble Bobble 2* is actually *Bubble Bobble 13*, the two games called *The Story Of Bubble Bobble 3* are *Bubble Bobble 1* and *Bubble Bobble 7*, and since *Super Bubble Bobble* is part of the original *Bubble Bobble*, then the true sequel to arcade *Bubble Bobble* is… *Rainbow Islands*!

1988
RAINBOW ISLANDS EXTRA (ARCADE)

Rainbow Islands Extra was released as a completely separate coin-op, and is the *Rainbow Islands* equivalent of *Super Bubble Bobble*, following the same pattern – it has the same levels as the original in the same order, but swaps the enemies around so that tougher ones from later in the game inhabit the earlier levels (for example, the first world is populated by the enemies from Darius Island), and gives the enemies from the earlier worlds new powers when they appear in the later stages. Only *Bubble Island* retains its original monsters, boss and music.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The only home conversions of *Rainbow Islands Extra* were for the Japanese FM-Towns computer and the Mega Drive (which also included the original version), so either use the FMT emulator UNZ, the Mega Drive emu Fusion, or stick with MAME.

1991
BUBBLE BOBBLE (GAME BOY)

Here's an odd one. The original mono Game Boy's version of *Bubble Bobble* didn't want to squish the graphics up to fit into the tiny screen, so instead they kept the graphics the same size and made everything scroll around. The screen only displays about a quarter of each level at a time, making it hard to see where enemies and pick-ups are, and the fact that the levels have all been slightly rearranged in layout makes matters worse. For no obvious reason, the GB version also features a completely new plot about finding the Moon Water to heal your sick brother (perhaps meant to explain why the GB version was one-player only). Bizarrely, he doesn't actually appear to be a dinosaur.

PLAY IT NOW ON: It works in Game Boy emulators like Visual Boy Advance, but we wouldn't recommend it.



» These are enemies from the Fairyland Story-themed world, guesting on *Combat Island*



» The last straw is the corner-cutting "flickering" display used to get all the sprites on-screen – only half of each bubble is actually visible at any given moment, resulting in an eye-watering, confusing mess that's a gruesome chore to play

1991
RAINBOW ISLANDS (NES/SEGA MASTER SYSTEM)

The 8-bit console version of *Rainbow Islands* – also subtitled *The Story Of Bubble Bobble 2* – is in fact a completely different game. While it plays almost exactly like its coin-op counterpart (but not quite – the scrolling system is different, for example) and six of the seven islands are themed after coin-op ones, the actual levels are entirely new and there are a number of gameplay tweaks, such as only being able to have a maximum of two rainbows. Also new are the cutscenes at the end of each world where – if you've collected all seven diamonds in that world – you get a chance to choose between some plot exposition or the chance to open one of two Treasure Boxes, one empty and one containing a special item. And finally, by now Taito had evidently had a letter from some toilet-scum lawyer, the jaunty version of *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* which was in the Japanese release was gone, replaced in the US by some vague non-copyright-infringing sound-alike.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The Master System version has rather nicer colours, so go for that one via Meka. The NES version runs perfectly in VirtuaNES.



» The deadly (and permanent) fires on the floor are an exclusive feature of this version



» We think we've just solved the mystery of how Bubby gets so fat (see *Bubble Bobble Part 2*)

1991

BUBBLE BOBBLE

RAINBOW ISLANDS: BUBBLE BOBBLE 2 (NES)

What? Didn't we just do this one? Well, yes and no. Y'see, as well as the two NES versions of *Rainbow Islands* released in Japan and America with different soundtracks, there was a completely separate and far superior one released in Europe by our very own Ocean. This one has much better graphics and colours, three rainbows, the arcade's proper level layouts and totally new music that's neither *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* or the replacement tune featured on most other ports.

PLAY IT NOW ON: VirtuaNES

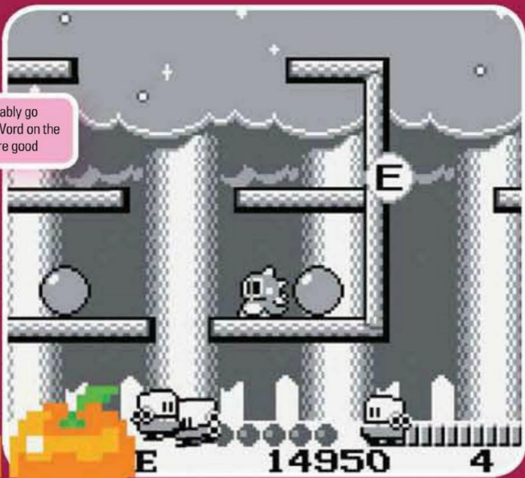


» For once, PAL gamers get the best end of the deal. Ha ha! Eat it up, Tokyo Joe!

1991
PARASOL STARS (AMIGA/ATARI ST/SEVERAL OTHERS)

Subtitled *The Story Of Rainbow Islands 2* (Amiga/ST versions), or *The Story Of Bubble Bobble 3* (NES/Game Boy/PC Engine versions), or just *Rainbow Islands 2* (PAL console versions), this is a rarity – a Taito game that's never seen an arcade. It's hard to figure out why it never surfaced as a coin-op, as *Parasol Stars* is a great game. Much closer to *Bubble Bobble* in playing style than it is to *Rainbow Islands*, it's accessible, beautiful and blessed with irresistible fairground music. The boys can use their brollies to whack monsters, capture stuff and throw it across the screen, or slow their descent in long falls in cartoon styles. There's perhaps less depth and variety than *Rainbow Islands*, and not quite the simplicity of *Bubble Bobble*, but it's still one of the best games in this feature and you'd be off your head to miss it.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The Amiga and PC Engine versions are the best, so use WinUAE or Magic Engine.



» You should probably go and grab that 'E'. Word on the street is that they're good

1993
BUBBLE BOBBLE PART 2 AKA BUBBLE BOBBLE JR (GAME BOY)

Here's where things start to get really messy. In this game you play a dinosaur called Robby (possible the son of Bub or Bob), in an all-new storyline involving the King Great Skall who, coincidentally, has kidnapped all your fellow villagers. The levels (still scrolling, as with the previous GB game) are brand new, and you now have a special 'charge-up' bubble power that enables you to float around at will (but not past other bubbles, and monsters pop it if you get too close) and allows for some interesting level design. The scrolling causes the same viewing issues as the original GB title, though, and while it'd clearly be a good game if you could see the whole screen at once, as it stands it's horribly frustrating.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance

1993
BUBBLE BOBBLE PART 2 (NES)

You know what's coming now, don't you? As alert readers of the intro will recall, the NES *Bubble Bobble Part 2*, released in the same year with the same title and more or less the same music, is… a completely different game. It has the original 'Cave Of Monsters' storyline, and looks a bit similar in style to the GB game, but the levels are completely different, and the gameplay's been changed too. While you (back to playing as Bub or Bob again, except they've really hit the pies in the intervening years) still have a charge-up float-around power, now Bub (or Bob – there's a two-player mode, but only one player at a time) grotesquely inflates himself rather than creating a giant bubble to float in. You now can pass ordinary bubbles while in 'float mode' – in fact they burst as normal when you touch them – but contact with monsters kills you instantly. (Also, charging up the super-power only part-way now results in a volley of ordinary bubbles being fired at once.) It's actually a pretty groovy game, though, and being able to see where the enemies are makes all the difference. (Unsurprisingly.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: The NES emulator VirtuaNES.

1994
BUBBLE BOBBLE 2 AKA BUBBLE SYMPHONY (ARCADE/PLAYSTATION/SATURN)

AARRGGHH! AARRGGHH! STOP IT! Despite being at least the seventh significantly different *Bubble Bobble* game, and coming out three years after a game subtitled *The Story Of Bubble Bobble 3*, Taito's 1994 arcade release became the fifth or sixth *Bubble Bobble* follow-up to carry a name suggesting that it was in fact merely the second game in the series. (For the sake of clarity, it'll henceforth be referred to by its alternate title, *Bubble Symphony*.) Subtitled *The Adventures Of Bubble Bobble – The Next Generation*, it's pretty much a return to classic *Bubble Bobble* values, albeit with all the requisite mid-Nineties updatings: four characters with slightly different abilities, pretty animated backdrops, branching routes through the game, nods to the parent game (the first boss you meet is Super Drunk, the final one from original *Bubble Bobble*) and a complicated new understructure to figure out, themed around collecting and combining musical notes.

PLAY IT NOW ON: *Bubble Symphony* appears on *Taito Legends 2* for the Xbox and PC but not on the PS2 version. There was, however, a PSOne release of *Symphony* as *Bubble Bobble 2*, so you could play that on your PS2 if you wanted.



» You wouldn't think he'd need to blow bubbles any more, would you? The big fat lump could just sit on them



» THERE'S A TRAIN COMING! GET OUT OF THE WAY!

1995

BUBBLE MEMORIES (ARCADE)

Now this is just outright strange. Released a year after *Symphony*, but much cruder visually (pretty animated location backdrops replaced with large static pictures of ugly animals – elephants, alligators, frogs), and with far less sophisticated gameplay (no multiple characters, no branching route, no sub-structure to figure out), *Bubble Memories* sticks out like a sore thumb. More or less its only advance over the first *Bubble Bobble* is the special charge-up attack (nothing like the ones in either of the *Part 2* games, it just fires one gigantic bubble that appears to have no greatly significant effect on anything except that it can catch multiple enemies), and releasing it hot on the heels of the far superior *Symphony* just seems like madness. Oh, and it's set somewhere called Rainbow Island (singular), and subtitled *The Story Of Bubble Bobble 3*. [Writer bangs head on desk and sobs.]

PLAY IT NOW ON: As far as we can tell there's never been a home version of *Bubble Memories*, so MAME is your only option.

» Dammit. We should have used the level with the elephant backdrop instead of the frog, and saved that 'mammoth task' caption from earlier for this one. That would have been totally funny



1996

RAINBOW ISLANDS ENHANCED (PLAYSTATION/SATURN/PC)

This major graphical and aural reworking of *Rainbow Islands* came as part of a release in which a version of *Bubble Bobble* got top billing, despite it being a straight port of the original with some brush-ups to the sprites. With so many *Bubble Bobble* ports available, you'd imagine people would buy the package for its modern updating of *Rainbow Islands*, yet it barely gets a footnote. Anyway, it's a tasteful update, except for the decision to make the PlayStation version's rainbows translucent, and the fact that it's based on the Amiga release and doesn't include the three missing secret worlds.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The PS version runs nicely in ePSXe.



» The PC version has nice proper non-translucent rainbows, but is a bit of a pig to run on modern PCs

1999

CLASSIC BUBBLE BOBBLE (GAME BOY COLOR)

The Game Boy Color version of *Bubble Bobble*, released eight years after its mono cousin, more or less beats what's left of the series' continuity to a mushy pulp with a six-pound lump hammer. Despite the title, this isn't 'classic' *Bubble Bobble* at all – the levels are completely new, with scrolling and an unpleasant vertical wrap-around, and the storyline isn't that of the arcade game but the Moon Water one that first showed up in the 1991 mono Game Boy release – although this time your ill brother is a dinosaur again. The graphic style is almost identical to that of the 1993 Japan-only mono-GB *Bubble Bobble Part 2* (aka *Bubble Bobble Jr*), with the same backdrop graphics, but the level layouts are totally different to that game as well as to the arcade. The music, however, has reverted to the original arcade tune. Still with us? Because we're not sure we are.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.



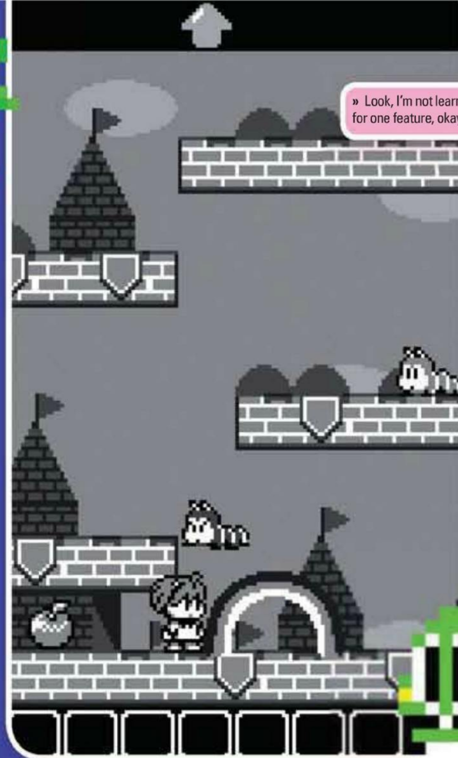
» Classic *Bubble Bobble*, just like you remember it from the arcades

2000

RAINBOW ISLANDS – PUTTY'S PARTY (WONDER SWAN)

Christ knows what's happening here. Bandai's Wonder Swan handheld never made it to Europe, so nearly all of its games are in Japanese, and so it is with *Rainbow Islands – Putty's Party*. All that can be said for sure are the following. (1) It uses the level layouts of the arcade game, but sometimes changes the gameplay, eg, the third world of Insect Island scrolls automatically. (2) You don't play Bubby or Bobby, but an elfin girl character, presumably the eponymous Putty. (3) There's a very detailed story, with lengthy cutscenes after every level, not just every world. (4) *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* unfathomably makes a triumphant return! (5) You can choose from four worlds at the start: Insect Island, Monster Island, Doh's Island and Darius Island. (6) You can only have up to two rainbows. (7) The game is played in the Wonder Swan's vertical orientation, ie, holding the machine on its end. The scrolling levels are two screens wide, and you get a preview of every level before you play it. (8) Despite being a game about rainbows, it was developed for the mono version of the Wonder Swan, and plays in black-and-white even on the Wonder Swan Colour. (9) There are some other game modes that we can't make any sense of. (10) We give up now.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The Wonder Swan emulator WSCamp. If you can find your way through the menus in 20 minutes, give yourself a pat on the back.



» Look, I'm not learning kanji for one feature, okay?

2001

RAINBOW ISLANDS (GAME BOY COLOR)

This little-known release is based on the Japanese/US NES version, but it's a very different game. You get 11 islands compared to the seven of the NES and most of the level layouts are new. You can play the first six islands in any order and the new between-world cutscenes are non-interactive. The colours are more like the coin-op, and the levels scroll horizontally – a stage being about twice as wide as the screen – while the music, curiously, has reverted to the original *Bubble Bobble* soundtrack. In addition to the story game, there are two new modes – a Time Attack (where you get three lives to complete one of the 11 worlds against the clock), and a Score Attack (where you get three lives to score as many points as possible from the beginning, no continues allowed). Both these modes appraise your performance at the end, with comments like "You are unbelievably terrible" and "You're hopeless. Hahaha!", even when you thought you'd done quite well.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance

2002

BUBBLE BOBBLE OLD AND NEW (GBA)

It took 11 years, but with the release of *Bubble Bobble Old And New*, finally there was a half-decent version to play on the bus. The 'New' option amounted to nothing more than a rather ugly graphical respray and a remixing of the theme tune with a few irritating Jar Jar Binks-style shouts overlaid on it, but the 'Old' version is a good solid straight port, with only a rather Casio-tone rendition of the music letting it down. You can zoom out in both versions with the 'L' button if you want to see the whole screen with slightly squished-up graphics, or put up with a small and pretty unobtrusive amount of vertical scrolling.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance



» Like the mono GB *Bubble Bobble*'s bubbles, the GBC *Rainbow Islands*' rainbows are horribly flickery



» Isn't it a little tasteless to have dinosaur fossils in the background?

2005

BUBBLE BOBBLE REVOLUTION (DS) NEW RAINBOW ISLANDS AKA RAINBOW ISLANDS REVOLUTION (DS)

We'll keep these brief, since we're short on space and there's plenty of information around about them currently. *Rainbow Islands Revolution* is a clever and inventive re-imagining of the game for the DS touchscreen, spoiled by unresponsive and unreliable controls. *Bubble Bobble Revolution* contains a decent port of the original and a 'New Age' game that's a bit of a mess, most closely resembling the Game Boy version of *Bubble Bobble Part 2* with its overlarge, sprawling levels split across both DS screens and scrolling horizontally as well. Playing the original in two-player via wi-fi is fun, though.

PLAY THEM NOW ON: Your DS, duh.



» *Rainbow Islands* on the left, *Bubble Bobble* on the right. Obviously



» For some reason, possession of a trumpet is now key to Bub and Bob's bubble-blowing ability

2006

BUBBLE BOBBLE EVOLUTION (PSP)

The PSP game marks the most fundamental departure from the classic *Bubble Bobble* design since *Puzzle Bobble* (a series which was obviously far too big to be included here, by the way). Adding a strange playing-both-Bub-and-Bob gameplay mechanic and adding puzzle-solving elements is a bold step away from the formula, and critical reception so far has been mixed. And that's (apart from some really weird mobile phone and arcade redemption-game spinoffs that there's just no room for) everything we know about *Bubble Bobble*!

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your PSP

THE FULL FANTASTIC STORY OF BUBBLE BOBBLE

Now that we've sorted all that out, why don't we finish up neatly by putting the whole series together into a single coherent storyline, with extra backstory information culled from a translation of the original Japanese blurb? Please, someone think of a reason.

A mysterious evil being (*Bubble Memories*) transformed happy children Bubby and Bobby from Rainbow Island into little dinosaurs (EXCEPT THEY'RE ACTUALLY DRAGONS) called Bub and Bob (UNLESS BUBBY AND BOBBY ARE BUB AND BOB'S CHILDREN, WHICH THEY MIGHT BE), and then the even more evil Super Drunk kidnapped Bubby and Bobby's girlfriends (*Bubble Bobble*) and parents (EXCEPT IT SEEMS THAT SUPER DRUNK MAY ACTUALLY HAVE BEEN SOME KIND OF MUTATION OF THEIR PARENTS). On defeating Super Drunk – possibly after overcoming Bub's falling ill midway through by finding the magical Moon Water (*Classic Bubble Bobble*), and preventing their girlfriends Patty and Betty from getting married to a couple of Super Drunk's henchmen (*Final Bubble Bobble*) – they regain their true form, and they (OR IT COULD BE THEIR CHILDREN) go off on an adventure to save seven cursed islands from sinking into the sea and thereby (SOMEHOW) discover the meaning of life (*Rainbow Islands*) from 'The Boss Of Truth' (WHO LOOKS LIKE A GIANT BUB OR BOB!), while trying not to drown in his blood after they kill him (no, really). The grateful islanders reward them with a pair of magic umbrellas, and they immediately rushed off to save ten nearby planets from an evil wizard (*Parasol Stars*). At some point after this, the monsters ungraciously return to Rainbow Islands (OR POSSIBLY SOME OTHER RAINBOW ISLANDS] and Bubby and Bobby (still toting their umbrellas) are called upon by the (kidnapped) President to save the islands again (*Rainbow Islands GBC*). Then they get turned back into dinosaurs again (FOR SOME REASON), apparently learn to swim and fight their way to the top of a tower to defeat (WHOEVER IT WAS). Meanwhile, Bob's, or possibly Bub's, son Robby gets HIS girlfriend captured by an evil wizard while he (OR POSSIBLY HIS FATHER] battles with a weight problem and has himself turned into a dinosaur (UNLESS HE WAS A DINOSAUR ALL ALONG), and rescues her by way of playing some volleyball and basketball sub-games (*Bubble Bobble Part 2*). Some time later, Bub and Bob's respective children (OR GRANDCHILDREN) Bubblun and Bobblun (AKA 'LITTLE BUBBY' AND 'LITTLE BOBBY') and their girlfriends (NO, WAIT, SEEMS TO BE THEIR SISTERS) Kululun and Cororun, ALSO get turned into dinosaurs (*Bubble Symphony*) and then have to use their varied bubble powers to crush Hyper Drunk, who is (SOME KIND OF DESCENDANT) of Super Drunk, and who WAS NO DOUBT ASKING FOR IT IN SOME WAY. As all this is going on, an elf called Putty (IS SHE RELATED TO PATTY?) who lives on the Rainbow Islands (BUT NOT ON RAINBOW ISLAND) suddenly

CHASE H.Q.

"LET'S GO MR DRIVER"



- » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** DRIVING
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £400+



HISTORY

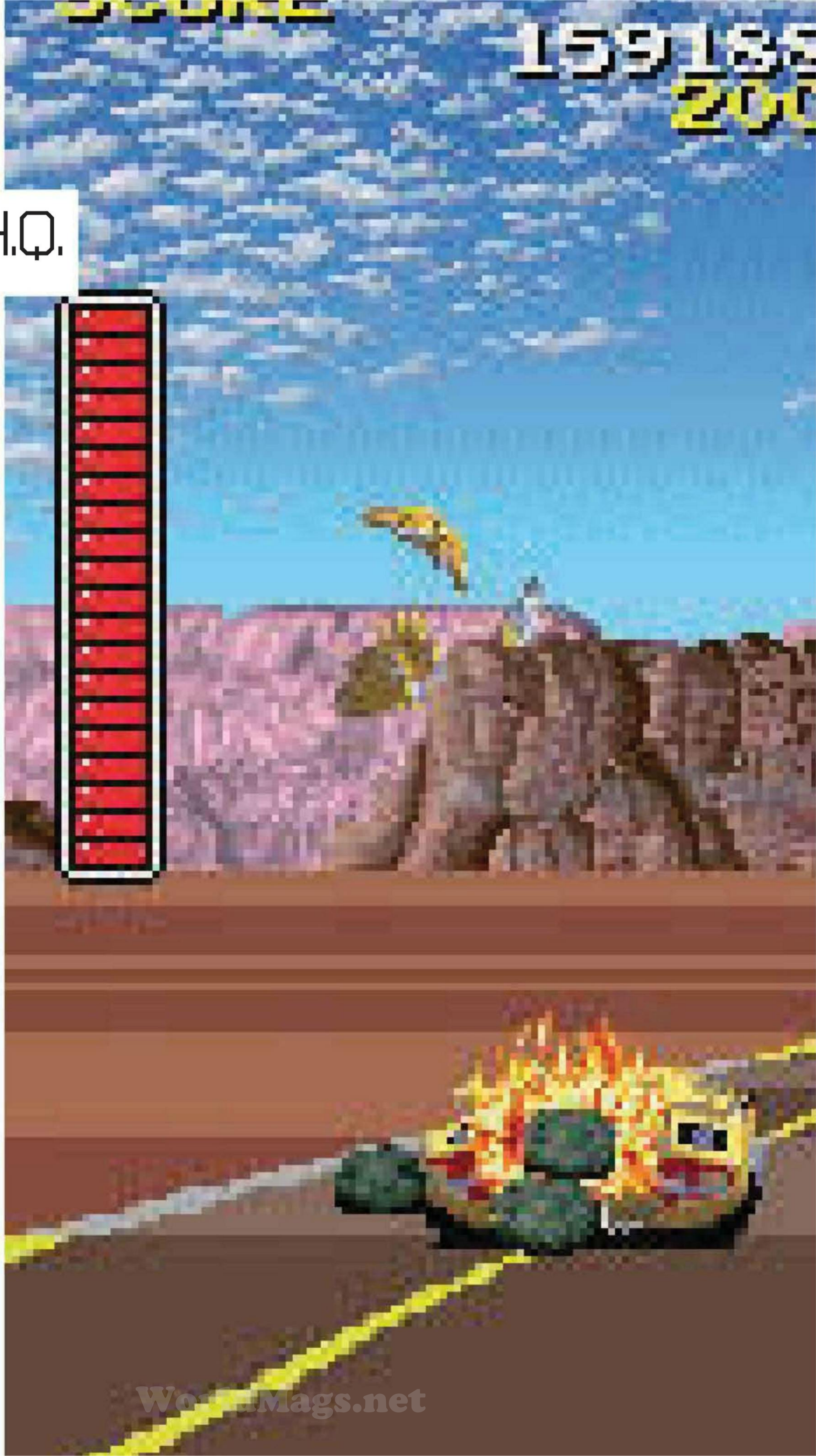
It's amazing to think that we first played Taito's *Chase H.Q.* nearly two decades ago, and that even now it remains a fantastic driving experience.

Yu Suzuki's *OutRun* may have made driving games cool again, but it was Taito's wonderful cops 'n' robbers title that put the fun back into the racing genre. Sure, we could cynically suggest that it poached plenty of ideas from Sega's iconic racer: splits in road… check, radio at start of game… check, partner driving with you… check, but Taito's masterstroke was to include another factor to race against, namely a dangerous criminal.

While most games of the time gave you a strict time limit to race against, *Chase H.Q.* went one better and presented you with a devilishly tricky criminal to bring to justice as well. The only way for you and your vocal partner to bring the perp to justice was to continually ram into his beautiful car until it was nothing more than a smouldering wreck.

Of course, this was easier said then done, as the roads were filled with a range of colourful vehicles and your opponent always seemed to have a better drive than your souped-up Porsche 928. Still, the thrill was in the hunt and *Chase H.Q.*'s remains one of the most exhilarating we've ever participated in. Ramming into the back of a Lamborghini, while your co-pilot pleads you to 'push it more, just a little more' still can't be beat (although the satisfying whirr as your turbo boosts kick in comes pretty close) – it remains one of gaming's ultimate adrenalin rushes.

In fact, our biggest issue with Taito's racer is that we're unlikely to ever see it on a compilation (and yes, we're well aware that some of the 8-bit versions were pretty damned good). Sadly, due to licensing issues and the nature of the game (companies don't like you smashing their cars up) it would simply cost too much money in licensing fees for publishers to worry about it. Still, at least there's 'Pursuit Mode' in *Burnout Legends*…





THE MAKING OF…

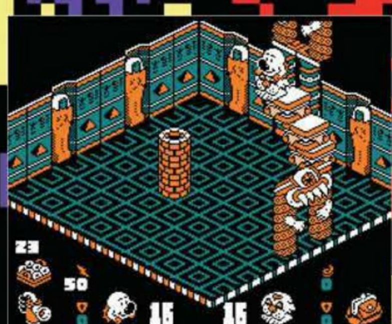
HEAD OVER HEELS

What do Batman, a healthy dose of bullshit, bizarre imagery and a strange partnership have in common? No, they're not all in Joel Schumacher's cinematic disaster Batman & Robin – they're major ingredients of Jon Ritman's 8-bit masterpiece Head Over Heels





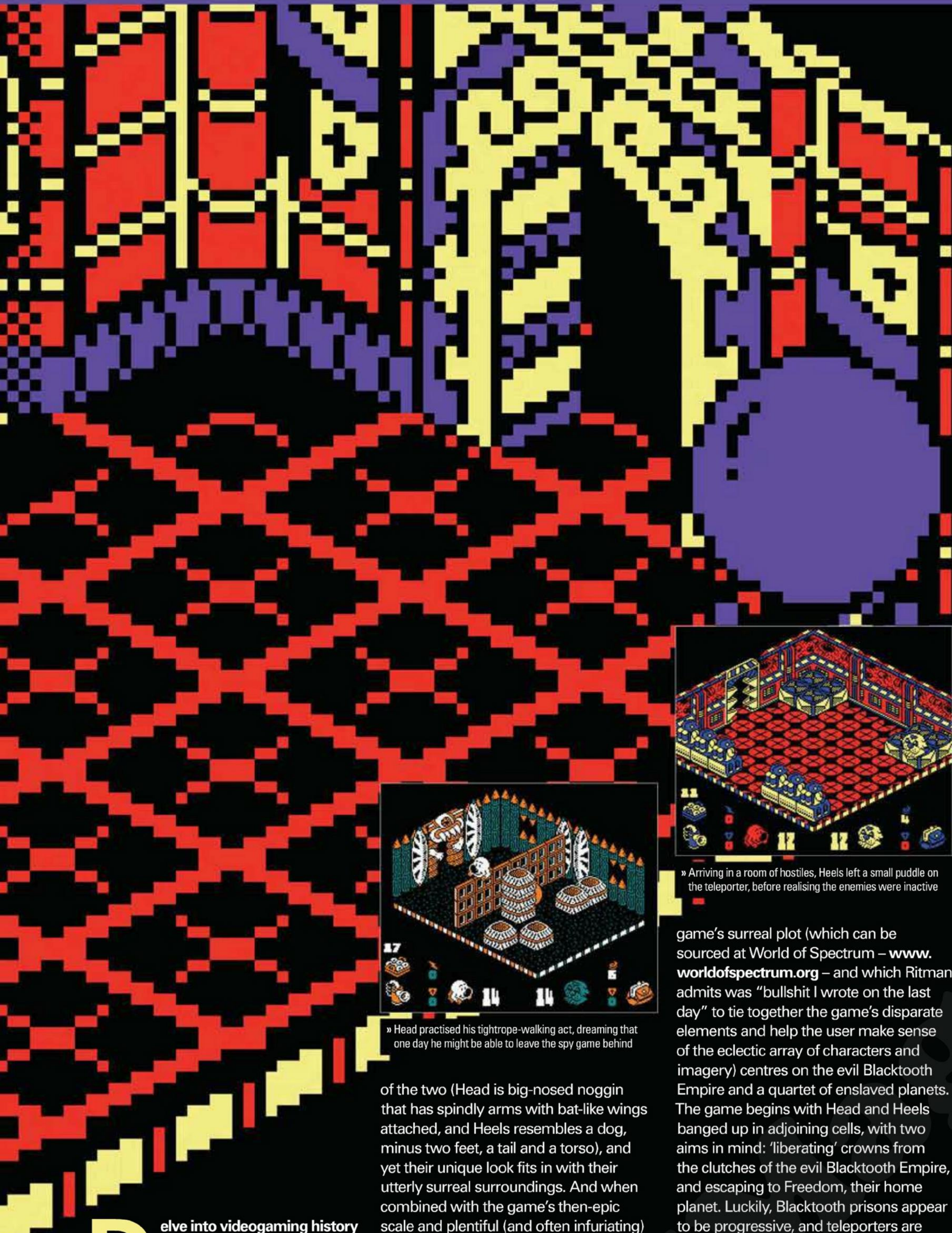
» There's something really fishy about this game! Heh heh heh! (we're here all week…)



» The sandwiches on Egyptus are so stale that they're only fit for building handy staircases out of



» "Getting that bit-part in *Doctor Who* was a mistake," mused Prince Charles, while Heels prepared to control him via a giant joystick



» Arriving in a room of hostiles, Heels left a small puddle on the teleporter, before realising the enemies were inactive

» Head practised his tightrope-walking act, dreaming that one day he might be able to leave the spy game behind

Delve into videogaming history and you'll be met with a plethora of strange-looking characters, along with a healthy population of anthropomorphic animals, out to right wrongs or to steal Sinclair C5s. The characters in Jon Ritman's timeless classic *Head Over Heels* are a rather unsettling combination of the two (Head is big-nosed noggin that has spindly arms with bat-like wings attached, and Heels resembles a dog, minus two feet, a tail and a torso), and yet their unique look fits in with their utterly surreal surroundings. And when combined with the game's then-epic scale and plentiful (and often infuriating) puzzles, *Head Over Heels* was ensured a permanent position in the top-list of any aficionado of 8-bit gaming.

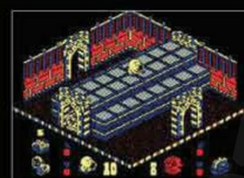
For the uninitiated, *Head Over Heels* is an isometric arcade adventure, where the player guides the stars of the show – who both happen to be spies – around various locations, solving puzzles. The game's surreal plot (which can be sourced at World of Spectrum – **www.worldofspectrum.org** – and which Ritman admits was "bullshit I wrote on the last day" to tie together the game's disparate elements and help the user make sense of the eclectic array of characters and imagery) centres on the evil Blacktooth Empire and a quartet of enslaved planets. The game begins with Head and Heels banged up in adjoining cells, with two aims in mind: 'liberating' crowns from the clutches of the evil Blacktooth Empire, and escaping to Freedom, their home planet. Luckily, Blacktooth prisons appear to be progressive, and teleporters are found near the two creatures' starting locations, so they can begin their quest.

When *Head Over Heels* was released, back in 1987, almost every publication from *Sinclair User* to *Zzap!64* was full of praise. But *Head Over Heels* always felt more at home on the Spectrum and Amstrad – the C64 was lumbered, by

"BATMAN AND HEAD OVER HEELS WERE BASICALLY UNPLANNED; I MADE THEM UP AS I WENT ALONG, AND JUST KEPT ADDING STUFF UNTIL THE SPECTRUM WAS FULL" JON RITMAN

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

The symbiotic partnership enjoyed by Head and Heels is central to the game, and you won't progress far without managing to get the pair together. As if the potential for a major power-up wasn't enough to enthuse players (when Head and Heels are joined, the pair enjoy both the speed of Heels and Head's jumping power), Ritman added further elements to urge players onwards. If Head wanders through the door from his start point, he'll see Heels in the adjoining cell, separated from him by an impassable barrier. And shortly afterwards, the pair cross paths, Heels in a tunnel and Head on top of it. "The tunnel was inspired by a section in Ultimate's *Alien 8*, where you come out on a balcony, able to see a room that you can't get down to," explains Ritman, adding that he "liked the 'tease' element to it," and used the same device to torment players in his own game!



IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** JON RITMAN (WITH BERNIE DRUMMOND)
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HEAD OVER HEELS





» If this is to scale, it's going to be a bugger to lug those crowns back to Freedom



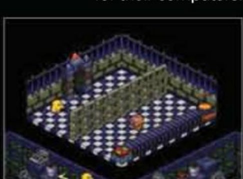
» After creating a makeshift staircase to reach the door, Heels decided that, yes, the architect of this place was a total idiot



» All aboard the sarnie express! Next stop: that freaky-looking door.

THE REMAKING OF A CLASSIC

Despite the popularity of *Head Over Heels*, few remakes of the game have surfaced, largely due to its complexity. However, a few years back, Tomaz Kac took up the challenge (apparently because of a "hastily scrawled diagram posted on the Retrospec mailing list about how you can't properly sort isometric games without complex masking," according to co-conspirator and graphic artist Graham Goring), resulting in a faithful update, but with wildly improved graphics and lighting effects that put the original 16-bit conversions to shame. "I've seen the remake, and it's pretty good," says Ritman, although he grumbles that "they handled the walls and doors differently, which has damaged the gameplay". Minor problems aside, the remake is impressive, and, for once, it's not only PC users that can join the party. On the game's microsite at **http://retrospec.sgn.net/games/hoh/**, those who favour Mac, Linux and BeOS can download ports for their computers.



comparison, with a sluggish conversion. Unsurprisingly, Ritman is an unashamed fan of Sinclair machines (and, by association, Amstrad's output), and his first experience with programming was with one of Sir Clive's earliest models. "I was working as a TV engineer for Radio Rentals when they started talking about renting out computers. It occurred to me they would need engineers that knew their way around them, and so I bought myself a Sinclair ZX81." Within a day, Ritman was hooked, and every evening was spent ploughing through manuals and learning BASIC. A week later, Ritman was immersed in machine language, writing his own hex editor, and realising that he needed to come up with a project to work on: "All I could think of was a game, and within a month I sent my first effort to publishers; a day later, I got a call from Artic Computing, who said it'd buy it".

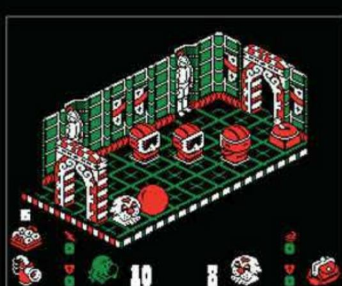
Initially, platform preference was largely irrelevant, and the ZX81 won out over Commodore's early output purely on price, but as Ritman progressed to the Spectrum, he felt vindicated in his decision to buy British: "I always preferred the Spectrum to Commodore's range, because of the freedom it allowed me when being creative – Commodore's hardware pushed games designers towards sprite-based scrolling games." With 48KB to play with, Ritman crafted increasingly complex projects, including the Spectrum's answer to Commodore's *International Soccer*, the renowned *Match Day*; but it was his next game that really struck a chord, while also forming the basis for *Head Over Heels*. "When I delivered the *Match Day* master to Ocean, I was given a copy of the then-unreleased *Knight Lore*. When I saw it, my jaw dropped – it was just what I'd always wanted: a Disney film you could control," recalls Ritman, who says he then set about figuring out how to achieve the masking process used for the display, and ended up bettering *Knight Lore's* effort.

The game that used Ritman's new system – *Batman* – would influence his follow-up. "For the gameplay, I decided what abilities Batman would have and then took them away," says Ritman. "I created objects that would give him those abilities – jumping, carrying, gliding – with the idea that you started with nothing and would have to earn each ability. When working on *Head Over Heels*, I did the same thing." Those who've played both games will notice other similarities, such as temporary extra powers and the 'resurrection' system, but *Head Over Heels* has one marked difference to Ritman's first adventure: the symbiotic relationship between its lead characters. When Head and Heels meet up, Head can plonk himself on top of Heels, and the combined freakshow creature inherits both of their capabilities. Alternatively, each character can wander off on their own, providing players with possibilities if they get stuck on one of the game's many puzzles. "I have been praised for the symbiotic relationship over the years, with many considering it genius, but at the time all I thought was that two characters, each having their own abilities, would enlarge the number of puzzles I could come up with," explains Ritman.

It's not that Ritman's not proud of his game – far from it. It's just that he doesn't appear to want to take credit for things that 'just happened', or where a quick, simple idea worked perfectly. For fans of such a renowned retro game as *Head Over Heels*, and one which has so many disparate elements that work so well together, it's surprising to hear that there was no grand plan. "Both *Batman* and *Head Over Heels* were basically unplanned – I made them up as I went along, and just kept adding stuff until the Spectrum was full," explains Ritman. "Once I had the basic engine, I would sit down to create some rooms, and come up with ideas." For each planet in *Head Over Heels*, maps were designed to take advantage of the two-character dynamic, with sections built where the two spies' paths would cross; further elements were then added that forced them to split and meet elsewhere. "I would then add the puzzles, making up each in turn, with no pre-planning at all," says Ritman. "If I didn't have existing code to handle it, I would program it in and then ring up Bernie to ask for appropriate graphics."

Ah, yes: the graphics. Although *Batman* was a good-looking game, *Head Over Heels* betters it and then some. The graphics are quirky and eclectic, with a strong sense of individuality and character. Ritman is keen to credit partner-in-crime Bernie Drummond for that aspect of the game. "Bernie has a wild imagination, and seeing as how the entire game was like a bizarre fantasy, I just gave him free rein to make things," he explains when we ask how the designs for the various on-screen objects came to be. "I would just tell him the size I wanted and roughly what I was going to do with it, and he would then give me a bunch of graphics to choose from. I made a point of never worrying about differences in scale, but just chose the best looking stuff." This resulted in legions of Daleks with the heads of monkeys, elephants and even Prince Charles, vicious jet-pack-clad rat-like robots, and hostile, squat droids that look rather like bollards. As if that

> "OFTEN, I WOULD HAVE A LOAD OF BERNIE'S GRAPHICS THAT WERE JUST WAITING FOR A USE, AND SO WHEN I NEEDED A 'SAVE GAME' FEATURE, I SAW THE LOVELY FISH AND MADE UP SOME BULLSHIT IN THE PLOT TO EXPLAIN IT" JON RITMAN



» "Ten-pin bowling sure has changed since my day," thought Heels as he rolled the crystal ball towards the switch



» Head leaps towards a tray of doughnuts, claiming his rotundness is down to being 'big-boned'



» Once our heroes steal the Emperor's crown, they'll be declared Emperor in his place



» Heels contemplates going to freedom alone after Head makes one too many jokes about being 'dog tired'

motley collection wasn't surreal enough, other items ended up having rather more bizarre uses, including huge sandwiches that are used as moving platforms for accessing otherwise inaccessible areas of a room, and the aforementioned giant fish, used as a resurrection device, providing players with a 'second chance' of sorts when all lives are lost. "Often, I would have a load of Bernie's graphics that were just waiting for a use, and so when I needed a 'save game' feature, I saw the lovely fish and made up some bullshit in the plot to explain it," says Ritman.

In the universe of *Head Over Heels*, even the more 'normal' items can work in a way other than how you'd expect. For example, early on, Heels can grab a bag, enabling him to pick up objects. However, the bag has a hole in it, which means items are lost if Heels moves to a new room. "This was a method of keeping puzzles in a single room," explains Ritman. "I decided on this tactic after playing a game where, like in *Head Over Heels*, you had a certain freedom regarding where you went. This game would have an item in one room that you needed in another, but often you might come across the item long before you saw the puzzle, having no idea what it was for. You'd leave it behind and by the time you found the puzzle, you'd forgotten the item ever existed." And so for all of the lack of planning when creating *Head Over Heels*, it's clear there was plenty of fine-tuning, in order to produce the most optimal experience. "I used to have a development kit in my living room. Needless to say, friends would come round and want a quick go on the game; I would watch carefully, and anything that proved a major problem would be noted and changed," remembers Ritman. "For example, I initially put physical and mental puzzles in the same room, but by watching others play, I spotted that they'd often suss what they needed to do – the mental part – but after failing physically a couple of times, they'd assume they were wrong and would therefore try something else. I realised I needed to separate the puzzles."

Luckily for Ritman, he was able to concentrate on these important details, because he reckons that despite all of the game's complexity, puzzles and graphics, *Head Over Heels* wasn't a technical challenge: "Once I'd sussed the method, it was pretty damn easy and conversions to other Z80 machines, such as the Amstrads, was simplicity itself". The 6502 and 68000 conversions, however, were programmed by others, although via a line-by-line translation that meant they even ended up with the same bugs. "The only major change for the 6502 version was to amend a couple of rooms that had particularly high item counts that strained the resources of the C64's weedy processor," says Ritman. The only bleak coding moment Ritman admits to was "putting off the scary bit of converting the *Batman* engine to handle the two characters". In the end, there was nothing left to do, and so he had to bite the bullet and get on with it. "Amazingly, it only took two hours," he says. "I was so relieved!"



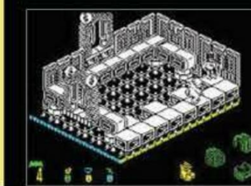
» Head and Heels get their reward for liberating all five planets: infinite crystal balls, fired at them from a huge gun

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

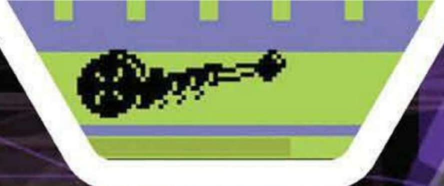
MATCH DAY
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

BATMAN
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986

MONSTER MAX
SYSTEMS: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1994

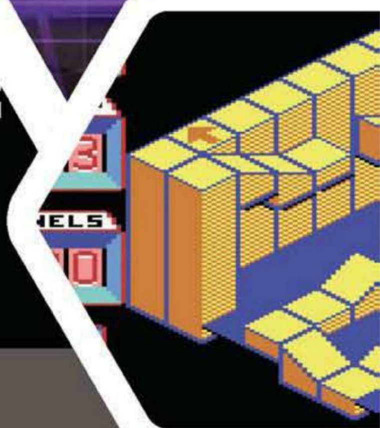






Activision is one of the few golden-age publishers still in existence, but the company today is a million miles away from that conceived by four guys from Atari more than 25 years ago. Mat Allen takes a look at the whos, whys and wheres of a publishing pioneer





October 1 1979. The day the videogame publishing industry changed forever with the creation of the first third-party company. "When you bought a company's games machine, you bought games from the manufacturer," states Dave Crane. That was no longer the status quo. Crane, along with Bob Whitehead, Alan Miller and Larry Kaplan, was responsible for founding Activision, though it would be a few months until consumers heard about them. But why would four designers from the world's most famous and lucrative videogame company up sticks and leave?

All four of them had joined Atari within a few months of each other either side of Christmas 1976, hired to produce games for the upcoming 2600 console released in October 1977. Over the next two years, their output was to form a notable proportion of the 2600's catalogue that included *Combat*, *Air/Sea Battle*, *Outlaw*, *Canyon Bomber* and *Video Chess*. "We found a synergy between the four of us; we always went out to lunch together or whatever, and would talk about each other's games and help one another," recalls Crane.

Then towards the end of 1978, and possibly due to Crane's background in hardware, Crane, Miller and Whitehead were taken off game-making duties and switched to creating the OS for the new Atari 400/800 computer. It was also about this time that an infamous internal memo did the rounds. In an effort to improve output and revenue, marketing decided to let the designers know which games were or were not selling so they could focus more on the types that were performing.

"So we were looking at this memo," says Crane, "and that was the first time we saw that Atari had accrued $100m in videogame sales in one year. So we were looking at these games and started to tabulate them, and we saw that the four of us did this, this, this [and so on], and we accounted for 60 per cent of Atari's sales. We then tallied the rest, and found 20 per cent were from people who had already gone, already left Atari. We were accounting for $60m in sales and drawing $30k salaries."

Miller continues the tale: "During that time I began to reassess what I wanted to do at Atari. One of the things we wanted was recognition for our work, like anyone else in the entertainment industry, having our name on the product in question. So I approached management about that opportunity and the others joined me later on, and management said 'No, no recognition'. And that was pretty much the end of my time there."

At that time Ray Kassar was CEO of Atari, and one of the changes made during his tenure was the company consideration of games as mere product rather than a creative process, something that irked Crane especially. These meetings with Kassar are also reputedly the source of the now legendary quotes "you programmers are a dime a dozen" and "you are no more important that the man in the assembly line putting the games together".

"Part of starting Activision was that we wanted to work at a company that respected the industry, and was capable of working in the industry. All the signs were that was declining at Atari. So we were almost forced out of the company," concludes Miller. "Joe

IN BRIEF

Activision was founded in 1979 by four designers at Atari who became disillusioned with the way things were working inside the company and decided to go it alone. Their success was to inspire the creation of countless other companies in the following years including Imagic, Spectravision and Commavid. Unlike many of its successors, Activision survived the videogame crash and flourished, but eventually succumbed to bankruptcy in 1992. Its subsequent resurrection makes it one of the oldest videogame companies today.



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

ACTIVISIONARIES

Decuir [co-designer of the VCS and 400/800] had just left to start his own company. We asked which attorney he had used, and the four of us went there about starting our own company. There we were told that we would need an experienced management person in order to raise capital and so on."

This experienced management person was Jim Levy, who joined them as CEO and president in the process of what would eventually become Activision. "Levy came from a record industry background and understood the marketing and promotion of artists as well as products. So the videogame business went from absolutely zero designer credit to something approaching rock star promotion."

THE GENESIS OF A COMPANY

Why the name 'Activision' though? It's certainly better than 'VSync Inc', the first choice and almost registered suggestion. Following a large brainstorming session the final name was decided upon, a supposed amalgam of 'activity' and 'television'. There was one other important reason: Activision would hence be listed before Atari in the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) book. This is also the reason why later spin-off companies Accolade, Acclaim and Absolute were so named. One-upmanship indeed.

The four designers left Atari in autumn 1979 and formed their new company with $100k venture capital and $500k in loans soon after. Money was never the problem here; it was always going to be Atari itself. "We were told that the day we opened our door would be the day that Atari would sue us," recalls Crane. He wasn't wrong. Activision had already sought legal advice by this point. "One of the things Aldo Test [a well known patents lawyer] told us to do was not take anything with us; this included intellectual properties, so we didn't. All we left with is what was in our heads.

"I remember the first trade show we turned up at, which would have been January 1980. This was when Atari ran a full-page ad in the brochure stating that it condemned anyone who stole trade secrets. I remember Levy reading that and saying he agreed with everything it said. We hadn't done anything like that, but from the start, it [Atari] was trying to squash us as best as possible."

Over the next two years, Atari bringing cases against Activision would be a regular event. Activision even went as far as having a legal budget set aside to deal with this. The major issue was that of the skills learnt on the job (ie, programming the 2600) and then being used elsewhere. This is what Atari had referred to as 'trade secrets'.

Probably the most infamous was regarding the 'Venetian blinds' technique. Invented by Whitehead as a way to get eight objects on a line for *Video Chess*, it was the subject of attention even though, at the time, no Activision game had used it. In response: "I produced a demonstration of a real set of Venetian blinds. Is this what you mean?" chuckles Crane. Needless to say Atari's lawyers were not best pleased and carried on. Atari lost that action, and by the end Activision had won or settled every suit levelled against it.

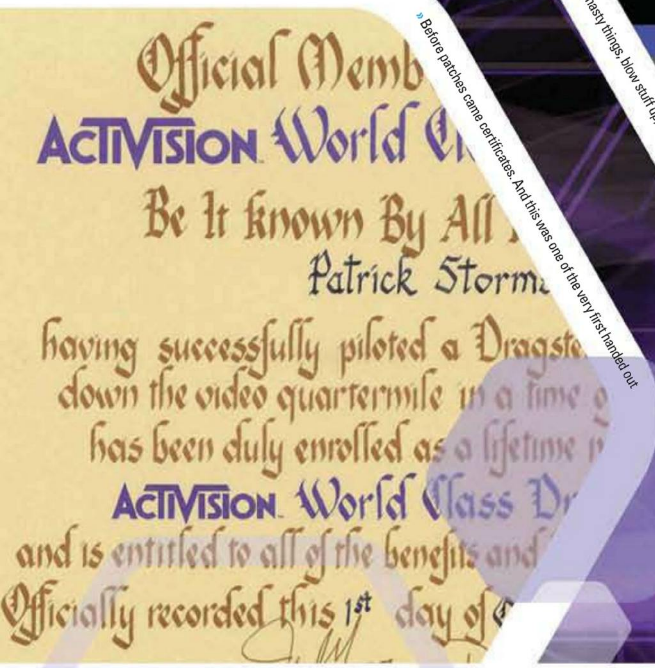
THE GENESIS OF A GAME

Activision's creation was made public in April 1980 with the first





» Blast nasty things, blow stuff up, rescue people. All in a day's work for a hero



» Before patches came certificates. And this was one of the very first handed out

» **Below:** The usual suspects lined up at CGE 2004 (from left): Dan Kitchen, Gary Kitchen, Dave Crane and Bob Whitehead



PATCHED PRODUCTS

Aside from cries for help or good old-fashioned praise, there was also another reason for the vast flood of letters heading Activision's way. No one is sure who exactly came up with the idea, but the company introduced an achievement program during the pre-crash times whereby sending in a picture showing you had bettered a certain time/score (listed in the manual of each game) would result in an iron-on patch being sent in return. Most games had patches available to earn; some of these are beautiful to look at, and almost all are highly prized today.

Activision also received many heart-rending pleas for patches over the million-point achievement on *Laser Blast*. Due to Dave Crane including a 'quick start' option to restart the game once completed by tapping the stick to the side, the company got several letters from parents stating their kids had earned the patch and upon setting the stick down in readiness to take a picture, had nudged it slightly and reset the game. Out of compassion, Activision honoured all of these requests.

sniff of games appearing at the Chicago CES in June. The launch titles that were released the following month were *Dragster*, *Boxing*, *Checkers* and *Fishing Derby*, and all saw healthy sales figures; Activision's turnover for the year exceeded $60m. With the average game development taking six to nine months, however (and with an attitude of 'release it when it's ready'), it became apparent during 1981 that more designers were needed to bolster the output. Steve Cartwright became the first new designer to join and would go on to produce memorable games such as *Megamania*, *Plaque Attack* and *Hacker*. Other notables such as Carol Shaw and Matthew Hubbard followed him over the next year.

Most interesting of the new recruits was the programming team headed by Gary Kitchen over in New Jersey that joined in June 1982. Kitchen recalls: "After playing *Skiing*, I called up Activision and asked for the head of product development, and got the guy. We were on the East Coast doing 2600 games, which was a surprise to him because we hadn't come out of Atari and, as far as he knew, there was no development on the East Coast. I had back-engineered the 2600 and had started to write some games; I had just finished writing 2600 *Donkey Kong* for Coleco at the time, which made his ears perk up."

"So we flew out there to meet the gods [the Activision guys] and to break the ice they had a 2600 on the table. Alan took out *Ice Hockey*, put it in and asked if anyone wanted to play. So Dan, who was the player, took the control and beat the hell out of Al. And at that point, we were in," Crane laughs. "We knew we had to grow the company more, but to do that and have a big bunch of people together would have screwed things up, but to have these guys 3,000 miles away was ideal!" This new development team included not only Gary's brothers Dan and Steve, but also John van Ryzin who would later develop the classic *H.E.R.O.*

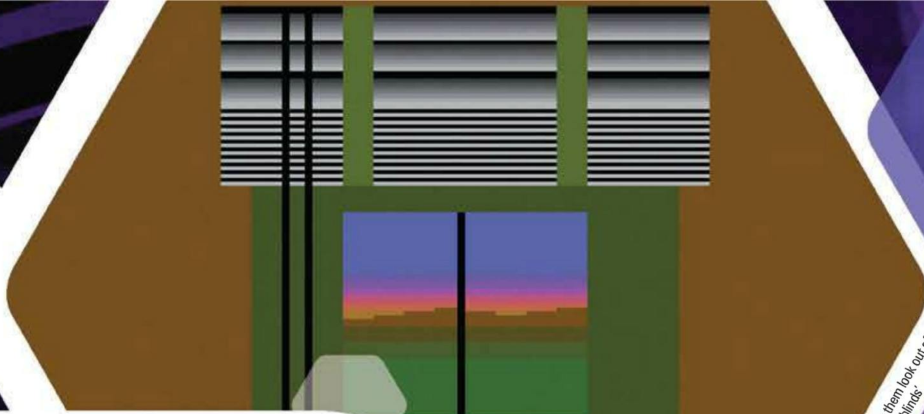
Kitchen's group had already been interviewed by Atari at that point, "but the synergy and atmosphere of Activision appealed more". It might have also had something to do with being told by the vice-head of product development at Atari that he could "put crap in a box and sell quarter of a million copies". This was just after the release of *Pac-Man* and Kitchen was in the mood to let him know exactly what he thought of the 'quality' of said game!

"We really did care about quality," says Crane. "At Atari we had three fully developed videogames that when we sat down and played them, they weren't good enough and they sat on the shelf, and never went out. There was one I kept going back to over and over again, trying to figure out how to make it fun." Lack of knowledge of the development process had been one other reason for leaving Atari, as later witnessed by several major wrong decisions at the company. Atari at that point seemingly was more concerned with getting the product out and selling, regardless of whether it was good or not.

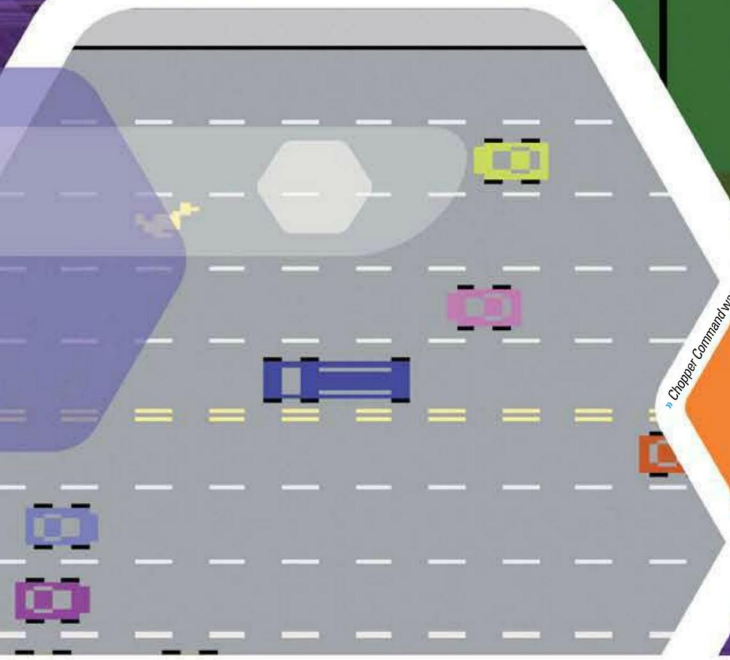
"There was also the video aquarium, which for the longest time Dave tried to turn into a videogame…" recalls Miller. Crane remembers all too well. "*Fishing Derby*! People would walk into the lab and become mesmerised by these fish swimming about on the

"OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS, ATARI BRINGING CASES AGAINST ACTIVISION WOULD BE A REGULAR EVENT. ACTIVISION HAD A LEGAL BUDGET TO DEAL WITH THIS"

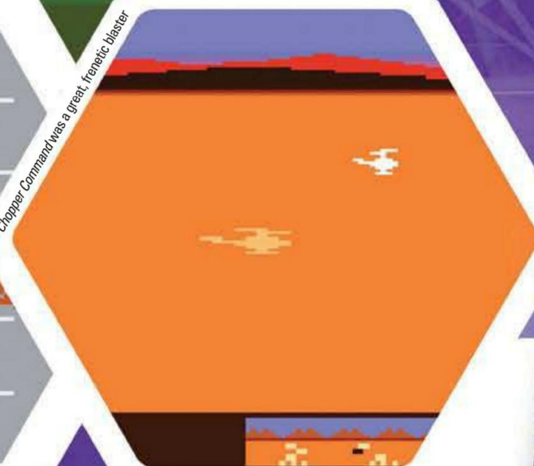




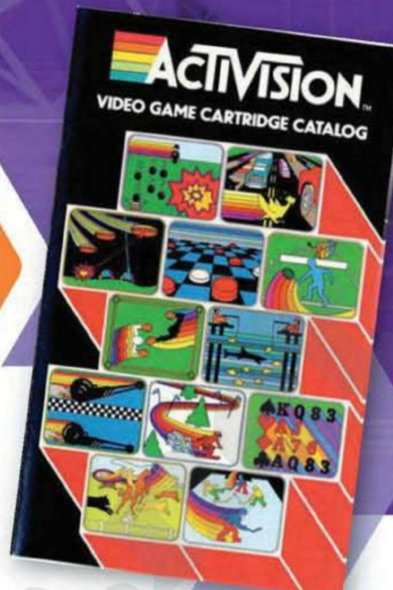
» How to piss off Atari's lawyers by making them look out of a window. Dave Crane's infamous 'Venetian blinds'



» Not copied from *Frogger*. Swear, scout's honour truth



» *Chopper Command* was a great, frenetic blaster



» The front of an early Activision catalogue that used most of the early box artwork

screen. I then made it into a fishing game using a fishing line, which was another technical achievement, but it still wasn't fun. It took Bob to step in and make a shark. He took the technology he had learnt from doing *Boxing*, and made a shark, so there was a threat." Miller concludes: "That became a common phrase in the company after that: you had a mediocre game concept that was trying to be a game, people would say 'it needs a shark!'"

TECHNICAL INNOVATION

Technical achievements and new ways of doing things were often the driving force behind many Activision games. The six-digit kernel able, for example, to display scores up to a million, was an early development and first used in *Dragster* to display the race time. Impressive, given the technical limitations of the 2600, in the eyes of Crane who came up with it, "it became the most copied piece of code in 2600 history."

"So I would sit down and think what new thing I could do, for example the Grand Prix car. I was thinking about how to make a large object that was colourful and animated, I made the car and as soon as you have the side view of the car, then the road has to go this way. Quite often, in my case, a technical innovation drove me in the direction of a game, but everybody did it differently."

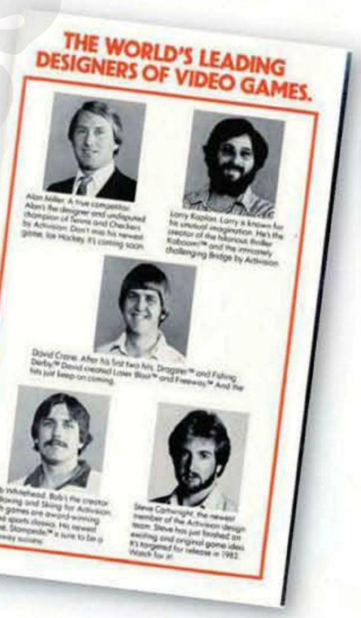
Whitehead was a big sports fan, and hence almost all of his output (including *Boxing*, *Skiing* and *Stampede*) was sport related. It's mildly ironic then that his biggest seller *Chopper Command* was not sports related at all, but based on *Defender*. Indeed a number of Activision titles had their roots in other games that were released at the time; *Megamania* was certainly a nod towards *Astro Blaster*, *Dragster* had been based on *Drag Race*, and *Star Master* was a heavy *Star Raiders* clone.

One of the most contentious titles was *Freeway*, often considered a blatant *Frogger* clone. According to Crane though, this is pure co-incidence, as the *Frogger* arcade was released within a month of *Freeway* hitting the shelves: "The idea for the game came from watching some poor guy trying to cross Lakeshore Drive in Chicago when I was on the way to the Chicago CES." Originally it did have human characters to control and little red splats when they were run over, but taste considerations caused them to be removed and the humans changed to chickens (as per the old joke).

Inspiration came from a number of different sources. Van Ryzin designed *H.E.R.O.* after visiting Howe Caverns in New York. Hubbard wrote *Dolphin* because he loved the animals and specifically tailored a key part of the game off audio cues, just like the animal would in real life. *Barnstorming* came from Cartwright seeing a biplane pulling a banner as he drove home one night soon after starting at Activision. These little things were often the genesis of a game idea, and the result was often a great game.

Adding to the game itself was the packaging used to house them. Activision's designs stood out from the more serious looking (at the time) Atari boxes, and it also later introduced screenshots on the back to give the prospective buyer an idea of what the game looked like. On top of this, the designers had their photo in the back of each manual along with some playing tips for better scores. Fame at last. As a side effect, it did also mean players could find which games they preferred and start buying others by that designer.

Although Activision was started as a way to separate their design skills out of the working environment of Atari, the nature of a growing company meant some parallels were eventually met. "There was always kind of a division: the lab and everyone else. It wasn't intended that way. We liked to work in a group, and if someone was like this [hunched] on their keyboard, then you didn't disturb them, but if they rolled back with their joystick, then you knew they were fair game. There was this non-verbal communication saying "I'm busy", otherwise you could all chat. The ringers were taken out of the phones and we



» The back of the same catalogue, with the beaming faces of the designers for all to see



» The river of no return. Well it would be, you can't go backwards in the game

» He swings through the air with the greatest of ease. Probably the most well known Activision game artwork

MASTER OF ACTIVISION

If there is one person you could name that is associated with Activision's games, it would have to be Todd Rogers. Not only has he maxed out or holds the world record for almost every single 2600 game the company released, he also holds the record for the arcade machine *Gorf* and has done a marathon run on the 2600 game *Journey Escape* of over 85 hours.

And it all started with *Dragster*. Dave Crane had written a computer program to simulate the theoretical fastest time the game could achieve, which turned out to be 5.54 seconds. In comes Rogers with a submission of 5.51 seconds. Cue much scepticism. Until Rogers reveals a flaw in Crane's program, he was popping the clutch into gear before the countdown hit zero, while the program was waiting until zero. To this day, Rogers is still the only verified person to have achieved that time.

Sensing talent when they saw it, Activision took Rogers on tour as an example of a clean-cut gamesplayer, with the proviso of being paid to play and promote games. The rest, as they say, is history.

had them flashing for example," remembers Crane. "In the end, we were behind this magnetically sealed door with a receptionist out front. In order to get in, you had to outrank her to enter. And that's part of the saddest thing about Activision, is that the need for privacy came to be interpreted as hushed voices when a designer walked through the lab. We didn't want distractions."

Kaplan retorts: "It was also a way of keeping the marketing people out. Leave the people making the games alone to make the games." Crane laughs and responds: "The problem with marketing and research was judging what was hot today. Marketing would suggest a hot genre and we would turn around and ask them if it would be hot still in a year. That's the something that the marketing couldn't do, that we were doing pretty well. We were tired of the games that were already out there, so we were doing something new."

Activision at that time had no dedicated focus group; it relied on its own designers to come up with ideas and give internal feedback. "We didn't just target our games at 12-year-olds; we aimed our games at a much wider audience than that, and I don't think games companies today do that so much anymore," Miller states. "We designed games that we wanted to play, that were quick and easy to start and didn't need a 400-page manual to read." Miller would often be the main person in the early days doing the playtesting, as he was much better at it than anyone else.

They didn't always get it right first time. Until one week before deadline, Crane had only given the player one life in *Pitfall!*, but final playtesting from the others convinced him to make it the traditional three. *River Raid* was rejected after the first playtest; given the quality of the game this seems incredible, but after it gained popularity in-house, it was reassessed and given the green light.

With the success of the 2600 games, Crane was assigned to reverse engineer the Intellivision and Colecovision so that Activision could port games to it. Activision also started releasing cartridges for both the Atari XE/XL and 5200, but in many cases the games were little improved on their 2600 counterparts. Whereas the difficult task of writing games for the 2600 "was where the core group was needed instead" as it dominated the market, the actual ports themselves were left to other designers.

Evidently the public loved Activision as much as Activision loved programming. "Our games were very well accepted in the market from day one. At one time the staff hired to open mail told me that we were receiving 14,000 letters per week for *Pitfall!*. We had an entire division answering letters," chuckles Crane. "We did receive, in the first six months, one negative letter: it was a young boy writing from his bedroom and it said "I hate your games, I hate *Boxing*, the players look like lobsters." The people opening the letters were wondering if they should show us this letter. They made that decision and a week later the same boy wrote back and he said he apologised for his previous letter; his mother had just sent him to his room and his new *Boxing* game was the only thing on-screen and he took it out on us guys. He did really like the game."

Activision was riding high. Then the crash happened, and despite diversifying onto other machines and continued critical acclaim, Activision was affected heavily along with every other publisher; at the end of the financial year 1984, the company posted an $18m loss. However, there was a potential saviour on the horizon – the Commodore 64.

By this time, work had already begun on porting over many of the Atari hits such as *Pitfall!*, *Decathlon* and *River Raid* with the help of outside developers. There were also superb original games released such as *Toy Bizarre* by Mark Turmell (a terrific *Mario Bros* clone) and *Tony Ngo's Park Patrol* where you controlled a park ranger. However, for Activision, 1984 belonged to just one game – *Ghostbusters*. Little has been made of the development process for the game, aside from some private discussion with Dave Crane in 2003. Until now that is, and you can read an in-depth article about the making of the game on page 222 of this collection.





If you got bored of the game, you could always sing along to the music



One of Activision's more successful non-arcade machine licences



Ghostbusters was massive. And by massive, that is hundreds of thousands of copies massive, something unheard of at the time for a computer game. But despite that success, it wasn't enough to completely turn Activision's fortunes around and layoffs were inevitable by the end of the year. Those who could or would switch over to C64 development were seemingly kept on, with others (including Shaw and Hubbard) deciding either to leave or be made redundant. By the end of the year, Activision had pretty much ceased output for consoles. Curiously enough, a few years later, when the 2600 experienced a mini-revival, Activision published a few more titles, most of which were co-ordinated by one or more people who used to work for the company years before.

of its Cornerstone product. However, six months after this acquisition, Levy was replaced as CEO by Bruce Davis, who had a different idea about where to take the company. "Bruce Davis' biggest mistake was treating videogames as commodities, rather than creative products. I only mention this because it explains why I could no longer associate with the company," said Crane speaking to Gamasutra. Sounds eerily familiar doesn't it?

Davis is also blamed for running down Infocom over the next few years until it was wound up in 1989, and very few of the staff offered relocation to Activision's own headquarters. At around the same time in 1985, the East Coast group under Gary Kitchen ceased to be Activision employees and worked instead as

> "GHOSTBUSTERS WAS MASSIVE. AND BY MASSIVE, THAT IS HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF COPIES MASSIVE, SOMETHING UNHEARD OF AT THE TIME FOR A VIDEOGAME"

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

It was around this time that Miller and Whitehead decided to venture out with a new company called Accolade. "The reason we left is because we felt videogames had been in the doldrums for a few years and we felt there was an opportunity to make entertainment software for personal computers and sell it on floppy disk," Miller states. Their departure meant Crane was the only founding member left at Activision; Kaplan had left in 1982 shortly after completing *Kaboom!* and would later work for other companies including Amiga and Silicon Graphics.

The following year, 1985, was to see the final vestiges of the old Activision disappear and a new direction take its place. Levy decided to purchase Infocom, the text-adventure giant, who was struggling financially after over-expansion and the underperformance

freelancers, as it appeared to be one way of reducing the internal development costs. Kitchen's group would work with Activision for the next three years before eventually going solo under the name Absolute.

During all this upheaval in the United States, Activision was spreading its wings into Europe with offices created in the UK, Germany, France and Spain. Heading up the European operation was Rod Cousins, ex-Quicksilva MD, who had left following disagreements within Argus Press after he had sold the company to them. He was hired mainly to change Activision's perception as merely selling American games. His creation of the Electric Dreams label was designed to export or create markets in other countries (especially the US) using UK-based games. It also became a haven for quirky and offbeat titles such as *Spindizzy*, *Mermaid Madness*,

R-TYPE VS. KATAKIS

One of Mediagenic's first decisions after changing its name was to acquire licences to convert some of the biggest arcade games out there, which included Irem's blockbuster *R-Type*. This prompted the next of its decisions, taking legal action against Rainbow Arts who were about to release its similar game *Katakis* in the UK. Poor Rainbow Arts were used to this by now, having also had its hit *Great Giana Sisters* pulled from shelves due to its similarity to *Super Mario Bros*. In the end, Rainbow Arts re-jigged the graphics slightly and released it as *Denaris*, but the obvious homage was still present.

And the *R-Type* conversion itself? Karma comes to bite you in the backside every so often. The original development allegedly ran into issues, and so a new coding team was required at short notice. Enter Rainbow Arts stage right. Yes you got it right, the team Mediagenic had blocked from selling a clone was now going to code the real thing. However, those damned short timescales came into play again, and given the less than two months Rainbow Arts had, the final result wasn't that bad. Naturally it could have been a lot better if it had longer to put it together.



» To hark back to olden days when this was new and seemed like a one-off game

» So stealthy, you didn't see it coming

» Probably the best tribute to that fallen ship, certainly more than that god-awful film

» Your type

Chameleon and the re-release of Automata's *Deus Ex Machina*. This gave Activision the opportunity to then start publishing for the UK's other two major formats, the Spectrum and Amstrad. "What's right for one country is not right for another. I see the group growing in general, contracting in publishing, financing a number of development houses' quality products," Cousins said at the time. Activision had already done this by publishing the early Lucasfilm titles in the UK (Epyx had published them in the US), and Interplay's superb text adventures. The major deal within the UK was to link with System 3; Activision distributed the first two *Last Ninja* games and *IK+*, and published all three games in the US.

As well as publishing games for other companies, Activision's output in the mid-Eighties matured, and is notable especially for many pieces of innovative software, mainly due to the freedom that the Commodore disk drive allowed, *Little Computer People* (or *LCP*), for example. Then there was *Alter Ego*, *Portal*, *Gamemaker*, *Sailing*, *Hacker*… the list goes on. But what Crane saw at Atari was about to happen at Activision too.

From the Softography, it's easy to spot the trend for licensed products starting in 1986. Many of Activision's early arcade conversions were of variable quality, a trend that was to continue over the next few years. Highlights include *Enduro Racer* on the Spectrum, *Ninja Spirit* and *Powerdrift* on the C64, and *Atomic Robokid* over most formats, but many of the others can be ignored outright.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL AND REBIRTH

Activision decided to branch out in other fields of software in 1988, and so the decision was made to change the corporate name to Mediagenic. Activision was still used as the publishing name for videogames; hence the likely confusion at the time with reports stating Activision had been acquired by a company called Mediagenic. The Electric Dreams label though was phased out the following year.

By 1992, however, this branching out into other areas had left Mediagenic so financially stretched that it had to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Following a reorganisation and merger with The Disc Company, Mediagenic changed its name back to Activision and concentrated solely on videogames from that point onwards. "Bruce Davis ran Imagic into the ground, and he ran Activision into the ground as well," states Crane. "Why they hired him following what happened at Imagic, I don't know."

Since then Activision has gone from strength to strength, publishing revised workings of Atari classics including *Battlezone*; acquiring the rights to publish the *Quake* series; and the seemingly continued success of Neversoft's *Tony Hawk* series, among others. It has, though, to all intents and purposes, become much like any other big publisher, with continued success via established series and not that many original titles. On the other hand, it has also published *Activision Anthology* for PS2 and GBA with as many 2600 games as possible crammed into it (and a few prototypes as well), and is probably the best retro anthology out there to date.

Today Crane and Gary Kitchen work together at Skyworks, founded by them ten years ago to produce internet and interactive games; Miller joined them in 2001; Kaplan and Whitehead both now do volunteer and charity work having retired. The legacy they started and left for the rest of the videogaming world however is immeasurable.

With thanks to AtariAge (**www.atariage.com**) and Shane Monroe for photos and scans used within the article.

LIFE IMITATING ART

Mention has already been made of Todd Rogers beating the theoretical best for Dragster. However it was soon Activision's turn to unleash a surprise for someone; that someone happened to be NASA. The game? *Space Shuttle*.

"The real shuttle used its large engines to de-orbit and its smaller ones for minor adjustments," Steve Kitchen, the designer of the game said at the time. "Our game worked the same way, but during the two years of game development and testing, someone accidentally landed using just the small engines."

Thinking it was an error in his programming, Kitchen asked NASA to simulate the same event on their computers to see what the real results should be. "We were astonished," said Kitchen. "It did it on their computer too." Despite Kitchen not claiming any credit as such, an emergency procedure on how to land using just the small engines was introduced as part of the real shuttle's instruction manual.





of game perhaps

SOFTOGRAPHY

1980

Dragster (Atari 2600)
Fishing Derby (Atari 2600)
Checkers (Atari 2600)
Boxing (Atari 2600)
Skiing (Atari 2600)
Bridge (Atari 2600)

1981

Ice Hockey (Atari 2600)
Stampede (Atari 2600, Intellivision)
Tennis (Atari 2600)
Laser Blast (Atari 2600)
Freeway (Atari 2600)
Kaboom! (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit)
Megamania (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit)

1982

Starmaster (Atari 2600)
Spider Fighter (Atari 2600)
Sky Jinks (Atari 2600)
Grand Prix (Atari 2600)
Seaquest (Atari 2600)
River Raid (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Intellivision, C64, Spectrum)
Pitfall! (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Intellivision, C64)

1983

Beamrider (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Intellivision, C64, Spectrum)
Space Shuttle (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Dolphin (Atari 2600)
Oink! (Atari 2600)
Pressure Cooker (Atari 2600)
Keystone Kapers (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision)
Activision Decathlon (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, C64)
Frostbite (Atari 2600)
Happy Trails (Intellivision)

1984

Private Eye (Atari 2600)
Mindshadow (Atari 8-bit, Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Toy Bizarre (C64, Spectrum)
Park Patrol (C64)
Ghostbusters (Atari 2600, Atari 8-bit, Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, NES)
H.E.R.O. (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Pitfall 2 (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Apple II, C64, Spectrum)
Pastfinder (Atari 8-bit, C64)
Zone Ranger (Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, C64)
Designer's Pencil (Atari 8-bit, C64)

1985

Rock 'N Bolt (C64)
Xcel (Spectrum)
Hacker (Atari 8-bit, Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Little Computer People (Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Chopper (C64)
Gary Kitchen's Gamemaker (C64)
I of the Mask (Spectrum)
Riddler's Den (Spectrum)

1986

Aliens US (Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Hacker 2 (Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Shanghai (C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Alter Ego (Apple II, C64, PC)
Murder on the Mississippi (C64)
Transformers (C64)
Dandy (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Deus Ex Machina (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Mermaid Madness (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
RMS Titanic (C64)
Spindizzy (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Xarq (Spectrum, Amstrad)

1987

Rampage (Atari 2600, Atari 7800, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC, Master System)
Kung Fu Master (Atari 2600)
Knightmare (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Wonderboy (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Super Pitfall (NES)
Enduro Racer (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Guadalcanal (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Top Fuel Eliminator (C64)
X-15 Alpha Mission (C64)
Aliens UK (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Big Trouble In Little China (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Explorer (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Firetrack (C64)
Super Hang-On (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Super Sprint (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Tempest (Spectrum, Amstrad)

1988

Commando (Atari 2600)
River Raid 2 (Atari 2600)
Ocean Ranger (C64, PC)
Bomber Raid (Master System)
Afterburner (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
F-14 Tomcat (C64)
R-Type (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Karnov (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
September (C64, Spectrum)
Cyborg Hunter (Master System)

1989

Altered Beast (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Die Hard (C64, PC, NES)
Mechwarrior (PC, SNES)
Dynamite Dux (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Power Drift (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Shanghai 2 (PC, SNES, MegaDrive)
Deathtrack (PC)
Grave Yardage (C64, PC)
Prophecy (PC)
Ghostbusters 2 (Atari 2600, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC, NES, Gameboy)
Galaxy Force (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, Master System)
Citadel (C64)
Incredible Shrinking Sphere (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Wicked (C64)
Stealth ATF (NES)
Dominator (Spectrum)

1990

Archon (NES)
Ninja Spirit (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
The Real Ghostbusters (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, Gameboy)
Adventures of Rad Gravity (NES)
Atomic Robokid (C64, Spectrum, Amiga, Atari ST)
Hammerfist (C64, Spectrum, Amiga, Atari ST)
Time Machine (C64, Spectrum, Amiga, Atari ST)
Heavyweight Championship Boxing (Gameboy)

1991

R-Type 2 (Amiga, Atari ST)
Hunter (Amiga, Atari ST)
Bush Buck: Global Treasure Hunter (Amiga)
Deuteros: The Next Millennium (Amiga)

1992

Ultimate Air Combat (NES)
Beast Busters (Amiga, Atari ST)

1993

Alien vs Predator (SNES, Gameboy)
BioMetal (SNES)
Return To Zork (PC, PS1, 3D0)
Popeye 2 (Gameboy)

1994

Radical Rex (SNES, MegaDrive, Sega CD)
Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure (SNES, MegaDrive, Sega CD, Sega 32X)
X-Kalibur 2097 (SNES)

1995

Shanghai: Great Moments (PC)
Mechwarrior 2 (PC, PS1, Saturn)
Mechwarrior 3050 (SNES)

1996

Power Move Pro Wrestling (PS1)
Zork Nemesis (PC)
Time Commando (PC, PS1)
Blast Chamber (PC, PS1, Saturn)
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain (PS1)

1997

Shanghai: Dynasty (PC)
Interstate '76 (PC)
Nightmare Creatures (PC, PS1, N64)
Zork: Grand Inquisitor (PC)
Judge Dredd (PS1)
Hexen 2 (PC)
Quake 2 (PC, PS1, N64)

1998

Pitfall 3D: Beyond the Jungle (PS1)
Asteroids (PC, PS1, GBC)
Guardian's Crusade (PS1)
Vigilante 8 (PS1, N64)
Heretic 2 (PC)
Apocalypse (PS1)
Tenchu: Stealth Assassins (PS1)
SiN (PC)
Battlezone (PC)
The Fifth Element (PS1)
Pool Hustler (PS1)

1999

Civilization 2 (PS1)
Quake 3: Arena (PC)
Vigilante 8: Second Offensive (PS1, N64, Dreamcast)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater (PS1, N64, GBC, N-Gage)
Blue Stinger (Dreamcast)
Toy Story 2 (PS1, N64, Dreamcast)
Guardian's Crusade (PS1)
TOCA 2 (PS1)
Wu-Tang: Shaolin Style (PS1)

2000

X-Men: Mutant Wars (GBC)
102 Dalmatians (GBC)
Vampire: The Masquerade – Redemption (PC)
Virtual-On (Dreamcast)
Blade (PS1, GBC)
Tenchu 2: Birth of the Stealth Assassins (PS1)
Alundra 2 (PS1)
X-Men: Mutant Academy (PS1, GBC)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (PS1, N64, Dreamcast, GBC, GBA)
Solder of Fortune (PC)
Spiderman (PS1, N64, Dreamcast, GBC)
Sky Odyssey (PS2)

2001

Doom (GBA)
Bomberman Tournament (GBA)
The Simpsons Wrestling (PS1)
X-Men: Mutant Academy 2 (PS1)
Toy Story Racer (PS1, GBC)
Pinobee: Wings of Adventure (GBA)
Spiderman 2: Enter Electro (PS1)
Return to Castle Wolfenstein (PC, PS2, Xbox)
Spiderman: Mysterio's Menace (GBA)
Commander Keen (GBA)
Tomb Raider: Curse of the Sword (GBC)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 (PS1, PS2, N64, GameCube, Xbox, GBC, GBA)
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX (PS1, Dreamcast, GBC, GBA)
The Weakest Link (PS1)
Bloody Roar 3 (PS2)

2002

Doom 2 (GBA)
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions (PS2, GameCube, Xbox)
Medieval: Total War (PC)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 (PS1, PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA)
Spiderman: The Movie (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA)
Lost Kingdoms (GameCube)
Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer (PS2, GBA)
Activision Anthology (PS2)

2003

Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven (PS2)
Secret Weapons over Normandy (PC, PS2)
Tony Hawk's Underground (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA)
True Crime: Streets of LA (PS2, GameCube, Xbox)
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (PC, PS2, Xbox)
Lost Kingdoms 2 (GameCube)
Soldier of Fortune 2 (Xbox)

2004

Pitfall: The Lost Expedition (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA)
Tenchu: Return from Darkness (Xbox)
Spiderman 2: The Movie (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA, Nintendo DS, PSP, N-Gage)
Tony Hawk's Underground 2 (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA, Nintendo DS, PSP)
Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines (PC)
Rome: Total War (PC)
X-Men Legends (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, N-Gage)
Call of Duty: Finest Hour (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, N-Gage)

2005

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, Xbox360, Nintendo DS)
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, Xbox360)
Shrek Superslam (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA, Nintendo DS)
Doom 3 (Xbox)
True Crime: NYC (PS2, GameCube, Xbox)
Madagascar (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, Nintendo DS)
Quake 4 (PC, Xbox 360)
X-Men Legends 2 (PS2, GameCube, Xbox)
The Movies (PC)
Mercenaries (PS2)

2006

Tony Hawk's Project 8 (PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360, PS3)
Guitar Hero II (PS2)
Marvel Ultimate Alliance (PS2, Xbox, Xbox360, PS3, Wii)
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam (DS, Wii)
Call of Duty 3 (PC, Xbox 360, PS3)
Gun: Showdown (PSP)
X-Men: The Official Game (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, Xbox360, PC)

2007

Activision Hits Remixed (PSP)

Timeline

Well where do you start with Activision? Its released games on just about every major Western system, and many of the Eastern ones too. Here are some of the most notable entries in the collection

1980-92



DRAGSTER (Atari 2600)
So Activision started with this game. It's also over rather quickly making it probably the shortest game in existence, with best times in the 5.6 second region. Deceptively simple like many other Activision titles, *Dragster* has a definite one-more-go feeling to try and edge fractions off your previous best.

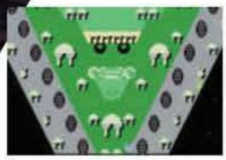


KABOOM! (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit)
One of those games of its time, where the action remains the same but gets gradually harder and faster as the levels progress. With the precision of the paddle controller, it takes real skill to manoeuvre the water buckets to catch each bomb, inspiring that oft-quoted term 'the zone' to come into effect.



PITFALL! (Intellivision, C64)
The big one. The game that made Activision and Dave Crane household names. Although partially overshadowed now by its sequel, *Pitfall* still retains the playability and charm it had, all done within 4K of ROM on the 2600. And to think the entire playing area layout is stored within one encrypted byte.

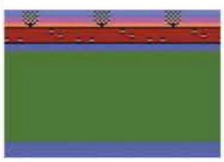
1983



THE DREADNAUGHT FACTOR Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Intellivision
Playing this makes you think it may have been the inspiration for *Uridium*. While lacking in speed and silky scrolling, it has a highly strategic element instead. While the aim is to destroy all the energy vents per ship, you only have a certain time to do it before each one reaches your planet. Destroying other parts first might slow it down. Inventive and entertaining at the same time.



HAPPY TRAILS Intellivision
Based on the arcade *Locomotion*, *Happy Trails* is Carol Shaw's 'other' Activision title, and improves on the concept by making the player collect stolen money bags from around the track on top of also keeping the moving object (in this case the sheriff) alive as long as possible while avoiding the bad guy. Paul Shirley copied the idea again in 1985 for the game *Confuzion*.



THE ACTIVISION DECATHLON Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, C64
The original and best joystick breaker, a year before Daley Thompson would be frustrating lots more players around the world. The 2600 version has an unusual bug in the pole-vaulting, which lets you gain almost unlimited height because Dave Crane forgot to tell the program to only accept one button press during the event!

1984



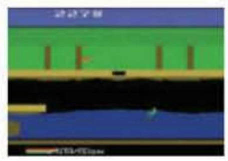
TOY BIZARRE
1984
C64, Spectrum
A clone that manages to out-*Mario Mario Bros* itself. While appearing a little more forgiving initially, in that you have the chance to dispose of the various toys before they 'hatch' and spread over the level, once out there the little troublemakers are difficult to remove and need strategy to outwit. And all the time Hefty Hilda is after you, making life ever more hectic.



PARK PATROL
1984
C64
Ranger Smith only had Yogi Bear to worry about. Here you must confront vicious turtles, ants that nick your food, drowning swimmers and litter. Then there's the mysterious tree that grows slowly and seems to give off hallucinogenic fruit. Lots of fun to play, it also gets challenging rather quickly; however there is an editor to change the number of various features present per level.



ZENJI
1984
Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, C64, Spectrum
If the name conjures images of mysticism and a Zen-like state, then you'd be partly right. There's nothing mystic about the game, it's a brilliant execution of an inventive puzzle idea; make all the paths light up by connecting them to the middle 'source'. The Zen part comes from the fact that just 'doing' and letting your instincts guide you works over actually trying to 'think' about the solution.

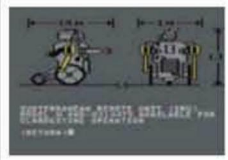


PITFALL 2
1984
Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Apple II, C64, Spectrum
Steve Cartwright actually came up with the idea of doing a sequel, but it was still Dave Crane's execution on the Atari 2600. For the 8-bit conversion, the programmer Mike Lorenzen had enough time to put in a whole second world whilst the others were finished, meaning you get twice as much goodness for your money. Possibly the biggest and best old school Activision game.

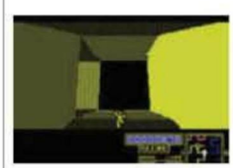
1985



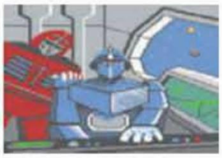
BARRY MCGUIGAN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING
1985
C64, Amstrad
Probably the best 'serious' and realistic boxing game available for a very long time, Activision's licence of the world-famous featherweight boxer added credence to its quality. In true *Rocky* style, take your nobody boxer, train him up and then challenge the best in the world in an attempt to claim the title. Clever, strategic and requiring thought, a definite winner.



HACKER
1985
Atari 8-bit, Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC
So you've found your way in. Now what? That was the question posed to countless people who took the plunge and dived into the unique world of *Hacker*. Deliberately left without instructions, it was up to you to figure out what was going on, who was doing what, and where you needed to go. Inventive and challenging, the game was a product of Cold War times and would be radically different if made today.



I OF THE MASK
1985
Spectrum
After the success of *3D Ant Attack*, Sandy White went on to produce this mini-gem of monochrome madness. The graphics move incredibly smoothly, even when going round corners, and the game presents a real challenge; having to map out the universes while searching for components of the robot in question, and then trying to subdue them by using the laser as they move all over the place in front of you.



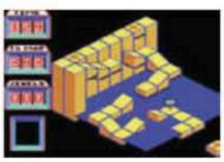
TRANSFORMERS
1986
C64
Not to be confused with the game released by Ocean, this shows that even Dave Crane couldn't always produce magic. Heavy on the disk access due to the large colourful graphics present, the game is a tedious mix of strategy planning and arcade shooting action, neither of which is much fun to play. The animated introduction is worth a look however.



ALTER EGO
1986
Apple II, C64, PC
Who do you want to be? Whoever you wanted to be with this compelling and unique piece of software. Designed in conjunction with psychologist Peter Favaro, *Alter Ego* encompasses seven stages of life, and may just reveal a bit about yourself in the process. The fact there are male and female versions means no one gets left out, or it can allow you to see 'from the other side'.

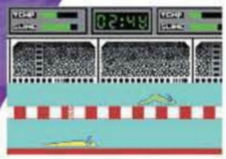


PORTAL
1986
Apple II, C64, Amiga, Atari ST, PC
Intended to be the first of a number of interactive novels, poor sales meant *Portal* was the only title to be released. With an intriguing sci-fi style plot and twists and turns aplenty, it's an engaging and interesting read, hampered by the slightly clunky interface. Worth checking out if you are into that sort of thing.



SPINDIZZY
1986
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad
Cartographer? Not the most exciting profession in the world now. But what if the world was unexplored and unknown? Paul Shirley's masterpiece in the vast expansive take on *Marble Madness* was a classic from the start. Big and challenging, this was one game that would take months to master and longer to finish properly. You best get mapping then.

1986



GALACTIC GAMES
1987
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad
Most likely an idea someone had to copy Epyx's successful Games series, but instead host it in space. So you get events such as the 100-metre slither, head throwing and psychic judo in place of the usual running, jumping and chucking. Daft, and a little bit fun in places, it ultimately was ignored in place of the 'real' thing.



ALIENS (UK)
1987
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad
Activision published two *Aliens* games, one under the normal label and this one under the Electric Dreams name. With the game taken from a pseudo first-person angle, it gives a much more in-your-face experience and tension when you see the aliens moving about.



ENDURO RACER
1987
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad
A perfect example of how two different programming teams can produce wildly varying results. The Spectrum version was excellent, clean looking and playable despite the cheat bug. The C64 version on the other hand was a complete travesty of a game, with no redeeming features to mention; even the sound was arguably worse.



AFTERBURNER
1988
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST
Like many of Sega's coin-ops, including *Space Harrier* and *Galaxy Force*, you do wonder what the appeal of trying to convert such a game to home formats is when most of the thrill is lost from not being in the arcade cab. *Afterburner* was a mixed bag conversion.

1987-8



CITADEL
1989
C64
The epitaph of Martin Walker's C64 career and a damn fine game in the process. Part strategy and part arcade game, *Citadel* was underappreciated at the time despite critical acclaim. Take your robot probe deep into unknown cities in an attempt to disable the security via force or coercion and hopefully find out what it is they are guarding. Truly a magical challenging gem.



MECHWARRIOR
1989
PC, SNES
Big stompy robots. With guns. How could you fail? As the only surviving son of the leader of Ander's Moon, it's your task to avenge your father's death and retrieve a chalice stolen when he was attacked. To do this requires money, skill, tactics and large metal objects of death. Entertaining and fun, the later games vastly improved on the world and ideas.



TIME MACHINE
1990
C64, Spectrum, Amiga, Atari ST
From the minds of Vivid Image came an intriguing time-travel game. Accidentally sent back in time following an explosion, you must make keep the future as it was and prevent the explosion from occurring. Clever, head-scratching (but still logical) puzzles abound, and solving each one makes you smile as you progress through each time zone back to the present.

1989-90



TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS
1998
PS1
Tenchu might have been released first, but *Metal Gear Solid* got all the plaudits for stealth action. Which is a shame because *Tenchu* does the whole stealth thing better, but at the expense of not looking so hot (indeed the graphics, even by standards then, were a bit blocky). If you ever wanted to be a ninja, killing people and then disappearing into the shadows, this is the game to get.

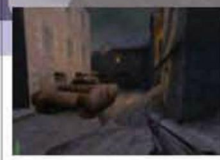


BATTLEZONE
1998
PC
A radical update of the classic Atari coin-op, but one that is very worthy of the name. No longer bound to the realms of arcade action, the new *Battlezone* has a heavy real-time strategy element as you micromanage resources and command other units to attack or retreat. If your own vehicle is almost dead, then you can even jump out and attempt to commandeer another one.



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER
1999
PS1, N64, GBC, N-Gage
Although there had been successful skate games in the past such as *Skate Or Die* and *720*, Neversoft's licence with *Tony Hawk* proved a massive success and put skateboarding firmly into the homes of millions of people. It continues to be one of Activision's most popular series now into its seventh game with presumably more to come in the future.

1998-9



RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
2001
PC, PS2, Xbox
The original *Castle Wolfenstein 3D* was the blueprint for the modern first-person shooter. Now it was time to update the franchise and give it the backing of some modern PC grunt. Helped out by original creators id Software, it's an action-packed shooting fest of a game, allied with a balanced, addictive multi-player component. It doesn't do anything new this time, but it does it well.



ROME: TOTAL WAR
2004
PC
War… what is it good for? Making computer simulations, that's what. After the success of *Medieval: Total War*, Creative Assembly switched the time period for its next game to ancient Rome. As a mix of turn-based and real-time action it works very well, with management of the armies handled on a rote basis, but all the gory battling happens as it is before your eyes.

2001+

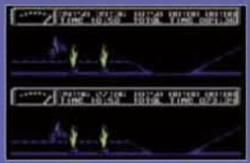
THE CLASSIC GAME





KIKSTART II

Craig Grannell delves into the dim and distant past, in order to wax lyrical about one of the finest budget releases ever to grace a home computer: Shaun 'Sout' Southern's masterful two-player motorcycling game, Kikstart II

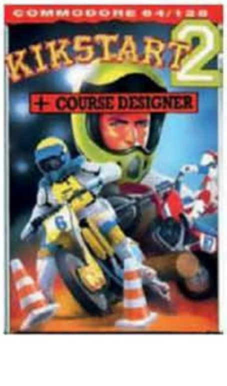


» Both players are about to get flambéed while racing one of the tricky night courses

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- » **VERSION FEATURED:** C64
- » **DEVELOPER:** SHAUN SOUTHERN
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** RACER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1

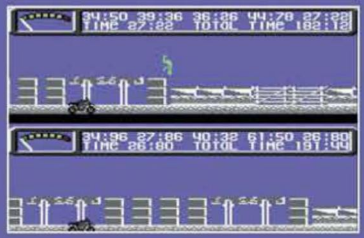


What makes a videogame a classic? Ask that question to a roomful of 50 gamers and you'll likely receive 50 totally different – and often contradictory – answers. Some will swear blind that playability is key, and others will impress on you the importance of groundbreaking ideas and originality. Some might argue that immersive, photo-realistic 3D graphics define a classic, along with chart positions, shortly before a dedicated retro gamer batters them to death with the controllers from their Xbox 360. For us, however, the definition of a classic game is simple: it's something that excited us back when it was first released, and that continues to provide hours of entertainment to this very day. Such games are even more firmly perched on their lofty pedestals when the 'classic' status bestowed on them originally came as a huge surprise, like with *Kikstart II*.

As a child, full-price games were something of a holy grail, simply unattainable with our meagre funds. Generally, we'd nip down to the local videogames store, pine over releases we couldn't afford, and then make a beeline for the budget section. Our expectations were always low: despite the occasional two-pound gem surfacing (*Thrust*, *Finders Keepers*, the reissue of *H.E.R.O.*), most of the time even as an 11-year-old we realised we'd probably have more fun melting down my two gold coins than persevering with the latest low-priced atrocity. But buying cheap games was all about rare surprises, and so what a joy it was that *Kikstart II* turned out to be that rarest of things: an utterly fantastic budget game. Similarly rare was another aspect of the game: it was a sequel that far surpassed the original.

On the surface, little appeared to have changed from *Kikstart* (whose name was in no way supposed to recall the BBC's various *Kick Start* series – honest, guv). Sure, the graphics were smarter, and the really annoying single-voice in-game tune had been replaced by an even more annoying multi-voice in-game tune, but the game was fundamentally the same: a split-screen, side-on, motorcycle-based racer, with your on-screen avatar tackling obstacles including dirt mounds, walls, picnic tables and bunny hops, and also rather more absurd complications, such as ski-jumps and fire-spewing devices that instantly turned unfortunate bikers to charcoal upon contact.

Appearances can be deceptive, though, and what propelled Sout's sequel from being a neat little budget game, like the original, to a bona fide classic became clear within seconds of attempting the very first level: it was fun, extremely playable, and maddeningly addictive. All of the original's problems seemed to have vanished. The controls were more



» When you come a cropper, you're catapulted through the air, a comic 'weeeee' sound hammering home your lack of skill

responsive, making the game more fluid. The frustration caused by having to guess how fast you were going before tackling the more fragile obstacles (such as gates) evaporated once the speedometer was spotted and made use of. And because courses could now be tackled with more confidence, the entire game was more intuitive, and it felt faster – more like a true racing game. This was further enhanced by the introduction of a computer-controlled opponent for solo players – and, surprisingly, the computer-controlled player wasn't a total idiot, instead providing a decent challenge. It should be noted, however, that devious and wily players soon learned that a 'catch-up' mechanism was in place. If you fell from your bike on purpose, you could often force the computer's rider to do the same. Doing so just before the computer arrived at a section with no restart points suddenly gave you a strong advantage on the current course!





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TRAILBLAZER
SYSTEMS: C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

P.O.D. (PROOF OF DESTRUCTION)
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1987

LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1990



THEY SAID:

"KIKSTART II IS EXTREMELY WELL THOUGHT OUT, OFFERING TWO-PLAYER SIMULTANEOUS ACTION, A BRILLIANT COMPUTER OPPONENT AND AN EXCELLENT SCREEN DESIGNER FOR ONLY TWO POUNDS. HOW CAN YOU RESIST?"

JULIAN RIGNALL, ZZAP!64 #29, SEPTEMBER 1987



Some courses took place at night (reducing visibility) or in snowy conditions (affecting acceleration), adding further challenges, and the game rapidly became all-engrossing, as we tried to shave fractions of a second from course records, or battled against friends, trying to replace their names with ours on the 'best times' high-score tables. And whereas the original *Kikstart* came with a paltry eight courses, *Kikstart II* boasted a full 24, ranging from fast blasts with numerous ramps to more strategic affairs, where you had to think a little more about how to proceed.

Whereas most budget games were soon discarded, *Kikstart II* retained the attention for weeks, and, even when excitement and interest began to wane, the game had a mighty trick up its sleeve: a built-in construction kit. As if the game's two-dozen tracks weren't enough, Sout somehow managed to squeeze in a full track editor, enabling you to create your own courses, which could be saved to tape or disk. And because of the flexibility of the editor, you really felt in control of your creations – for example, it enabled you to overlay objects, so you could use the second half of ski-jumps, or cut slopes short. Ultimately, if a course didn't work, it was down to you, the designer. In those pre-internet days, it was rare for a game to foster a sense of community – especially a game that cost just two pounds – but that's exactly what *Kikstart II* managed to do.

Inevitably, the *Kikstart* legacy didn't entirely end with Mastertronic's budget smash. Sout attempted to shift the concept to full price, instead creating an unofficial follow-up for Gremlin Graphics: *Super Scramble Simulator*. It lacked *Kikstart II*'s two-player mode, construction kit and immediacy, instead offering arduous courses, more complex controls, gears and a much bigger main sprite. Unsurprisingly, many were critical of the game, but then we'd already experienced the best side-on motorcycling game that money could buy, so we didn't need another.



» Just like real-life motocross courses, *Kikstart II* includes ski-jumps and giant springs – no, wait…

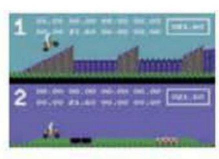


» *Kikstart II*'s user-friendly construction kit enables you to create dozens of courses to share with (or inflict on) your friends

THE OTHER KIKSTART II

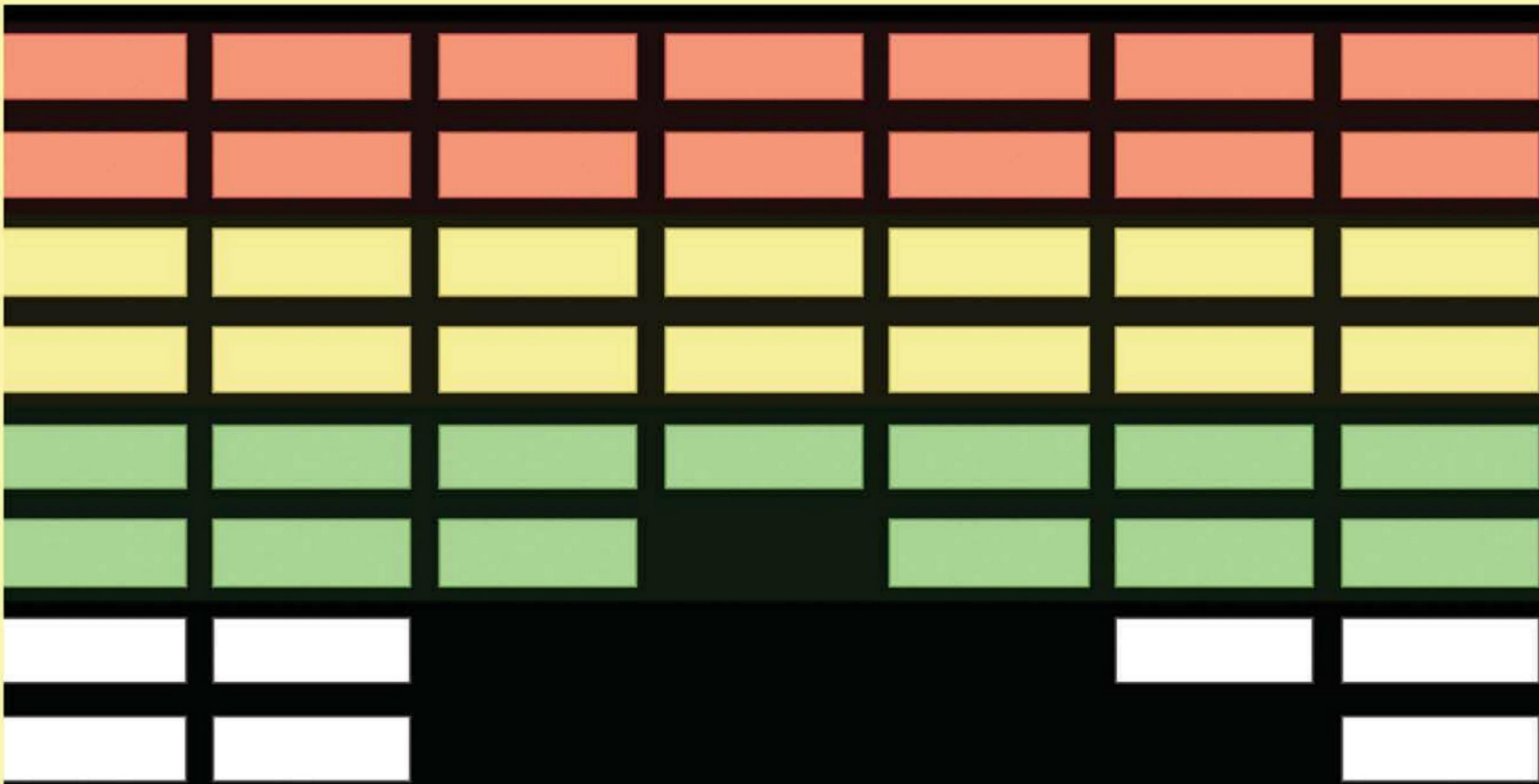
Shaun Southern's 8-bit motorcycling masterpiece (which eventually also surfaced on the Amiga) wasn't the only game to sport the name *Kikstart II*. About a year earlier, another *Kikstart II* appeared, also released by Mastertronic, albeit only for a single platform: the unloved and under-supported Commodore 128. Most publishers ignored this machine, assuming its owners would play compatible C64 games instead, but Mastertronic bucked the trend with *Kikstart II*, even dropping the price tag of its disk-based effort to a wallet-friendly £4.99.

For your extra three quid (over the typical budget price of the time), you got what in hindsight is almost a beta version of the de-facto *Kikstart II*: the graphics are improved over the original; there are new features, including giant springboards that send you flying through the air; a computer-controlled opponent appears in one-player mode; and there are 27 courses – more than three times the number found in *Kikstart*.



"WHAT PROPELLED SOUT'S SEQUEL TO A BONA FIDE CLASSIC BECAME CLEAR WITHIN SECONDS OF ATTEMPTING THE VERY FIRST LEVEL: IT WAS FUN, EXTREMELY PLAYABLE, AND MADDENINGLY ADDICTIVE"





THE MAKING OF...

BREAKOUT

Celebrating its 30th anniversary last year, Atari's seminal bat-'n'-ball-a-thon still accounts for a significant portion of our daily thumb exercise. Spanner talked bricks, balls and inspirational sleep deprivation with the man who built the game from scratch in just four days, Steve Wozniak



» The production model of the original *Breakout* arcade upright, which may or may not contain elements of Woz's incredible designs

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **DEVELOPER:** STEVE WOZNIAK
- » **RELEASED:** 1976
- » **GENRE:** BAT-'N'-BALL
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £400-600

A direct member of the *Pong* lineage, *Breakout* not only retained the perilously addictive gameplay of its elder brother, but was immediately inaugurated into the original videogame pantheon. Each brick that was knocked from *Breakout*'s simplistic black-and-white monitor was laid in the foundations of the industry that changed our lives.

"When I set out to build the Apple II, I chose to make a machine that was not only a computer, but had the hardware capable of playing arcade games. I had *Breakout* on a computer in mind the entire time," remembers the game's designer, Steve Wozniak, as he reflects on the importance it holds for him.

The full story of how Woz found himself working nights at Atari designing a game for his friend, Steve Jobs, has been thoroughly recounted a few times, proving the significance of the electronic wall-destroying concept. Less well known, perhaps, is the sheer weight of genius that was behind its hardware design, and to tell that side of the story, Wozniak walked us through his introduction to computers, electronics and the world of videogames.

"I played a lot of games before computers came along. We had a GE timeshare terminal at our high school for a day or two in 1968 and I may have seen games on it – I don't remember – but I did take the short chance to try programming for the first time," remembers Wozniak, casually breaking our hearts as he brushes lightly over the moment Apple's seeds were planted. He continues: "In 1970 I visited my friend Allen Baum at the Stanford AI Centre, and they had *Spacewar*



» The man with bricks in his head. Steve Wozniak – programmer, engineer, philanthropist, joker



» The brick wall and graffiti motif was used for both the original and the sequel

"WHEN I SET OUT TO BUILD THE APPLE II, I CHOSE TO MAKE A MACHINE THAT WAS NOT ONLY A COMPUTER, BUT HAD THE HARDWARE CAPABLE OF PLAYING ARCADE GAMES" STEVE WOZNIAK

running on a PDP 11. I saw it played but didn't get around to playing it. So *Pong* in a bowling alley may have been the first videogame I played for real. This would have been about 1973. Shortly after that, in 1974, I built a terminal to access the dozen university computers on the ARPAnet. Also, I found out about a local timeshare system, Call Computer. I think it was Call Computer where I got to play *Star Trek* and *Wumpus*."

An introduction to computer and videogames that is no more remarkable than yours, ours, or the billion other people who developed a passion for this marvellous distraction.

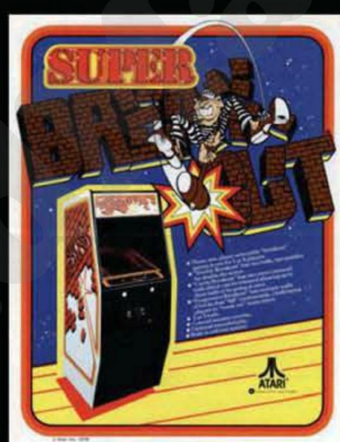
The difference between Steve Wozniak and all the other gamers of the world is his uncanny ability to understand the intricate workings of those games and their hardware – an understanding that would ensure his future was intertwined with the world of electronic design and prompt him to seek out people of a similar disposition.

"A friend, Bill Fernandez, and I built a computer I'd designed in his garage. I supplied the design, redesigns and testing procedures and Bill wired the computer. He introduced me to Steve Jobs as someone who liked electronics and pranks, like myself. I recall meeting Steve on the sidewalk and we sized each other up by the pranks we'd pulled." An intriguing, sideways glance into the personalities of two of the computer industry's principal pioneers. Rather than comparing electronic design achievements, or even discussing *Dungeons & Dragons* as we might expect from such young, academic minds, their first encounter was filled with stories of juvenile high jinks.

It was undoubtedly this rakish bonding of personalities that allowed them to reinvent the world of computing a few years later. Wozniak tells us how the two of them got their introduction to the playboy world of game design at Atari, an experience that would resonate throughout their accomplished working lives. "Around 1974 Steve went down to Atari and got a job there, finishing products that came from their design centre at Grass Valley. After I designed a *Pong* clone in only 28 chips, two of which were PROMs from HP that would spell out four letter words when you missed the ball, Steve introduced me to Nolan Bushnell and Al Alcorn, and they offered me a job on the spot. I explained to them that I already had my job for life at Hewlett Packard," laughs Woz, musing on the direction his life took shortly after he had insisted he would never leave HP.

It seems inevitable that someone who had spent time wandering the hallowed shop floor of old Atari, and was able to build his own computer hardware from scratch, would be drafted in to work on one of Bushnell's famous machines, and indeed Woz was.

"I was a top designer of digital stuff, known for building things with about half the TTL chips of normal designers. Steve came to me and said that Nolan wanted a particular game making and didn't like the fact that their PCBs were getting close to 200 chips. Steve asked if I would design it. The hitch was that Steve needed money or had to travel in just four days!" Despite the enormity and nigh on impossibility of the



» The arcade sequel was, externally, pretty much the same game, with the addition of being micro controlled and having a two-player option

THE PROGRAMMER & THE JOKER

"When I'd built the Apple II, it crossed my mind that maybe a fun arcade game could be written in BASIC, instead of assembly language. One day I sat down and programmed *Breakout*, with hundreds of variations, in BASIC, in half an hour. This much trial and modification would have taken me the rest of my life in hardware. I called Steve Jobs over to my apartment and was shaking as I told him how the world was going to change now that games were software. It was a true Eureka moment. I added a secret command to my BASIC *Breakout*. When you typed CTRL+Z, the game played automatically, never missing the ball. It deliberately made the paddle jiggle, so as to hide the fact it was automatically never missing. At the Homebrew Computer Club I let John Draper (Captain Crunch of blue box fame) play it and I typed CTRL+Z. The crowd was mesmerized as he never missed the ball and won the game in about 15 minutes. He didn't know that he wasn't in control!" Steve Wozniak.



BREAKOUT



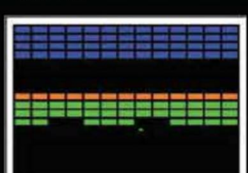
» The wall-mounted version of *Breakout* kind of looked like a fag machine, but it certainly brought in the cash (also like a fag machine)

SERIES HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER BREAKOUT
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1978

ARKANOID
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 8-BIT, ATARI ST, COMMODORE 64, DOS, MSX, NES, TRS-80 COCO, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

BREAKOUT 2000
SYSTEMS: JAGUAR
YEAR: 1996



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
SUPER BREAKOUT
BREAKOUT 2000



» The G7000's *Dam Buster* allowed player two to try and rebuild the lines as player one broke them down – a fantastic rendition of the classic concept

task, dangling such a challenging carrot in front of someone like Woz is a sure way to set the wheels of his talent in motion.

"A hardware design would typically take three-to-six months, minimum, working full time. I gulped and knew I probably couldn't do it, but I took the challenge. By the last night I was so tired and my head spinning so fast that I wasn't going to try and save any chips. It was expected to have taken about 120 chips, but my design came out to about 45 by that point in time. Steve and I had both got mononucleosis and I had work at HP a couple of the days, then classes at San Jose State as well. I didn't sleep for four days, but I succeeded!" As if the challenge wasn't demanding enough, the sheer physical endurance of completing the design under such conditions is downright staggering.

Not only did this astonishing feat of stamina yield an impressively low chip count, the game itself was incredibly addictive – a guaranteed arcade hit. The original idea belonged to Nolan Bushnell, but Woz had shown an aptitude for game design as well as electronics, and accurately predicted many of the required gameplay aspects from the loose specification he'd been given.

"It wasn't like I took some existing design and optimised it. My design was from scratch, from a verbal description of the game by Steve Jobs. Nolan Bushnell had the original concept. It's possible that some of the game concept was Steve's but he didn't take credit for any of it. I positioned the bricks where it took the least gates (chips). I thought there was a chance to save a gate or two by moving the score from the bottom to the top, or vice versa, but Steve said that it had to be exactly where it was; that was straight from Nolan.

I hadn't understood that the ball could bounce behind the bricks and knock them out until we got the prototype partially working, and then Steve pointed out that I had added it." Politely unassuming when it comes to acknowledging his own tremendous abilities, it doesn't change the fact that Woz had produced something of a miracle when the Atari engineers came to dissect what had appeared in their labs overnight. They could not make sense of the intricate design, and would have refused to believe it even worked were it not standing before them in all its ball-bouncing, brick-breaking glory.



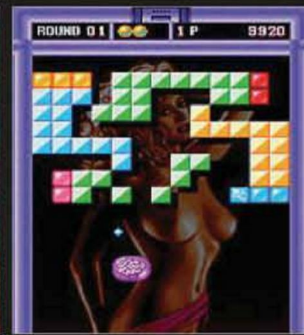
» The Jaguar's *Breakout 2000* took the franchise into the third-dimension

"I do tricky things to meet chip limits, and I already had some techniques for TV horizontal and vertical counter chains and NTSC blanking signals and the like. I also had paddle techniques that I may have re-used. But the bricks, ball motion and angles, score and everything else were

"THE BRICKS, BALL MOTION AND ANGLES, SCORE AND EVERYTHING ELSE WERE TOTALLY FRESH DESIGNS, ALL ACHIEVED IN FOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS"
STEVE WOZNIAK

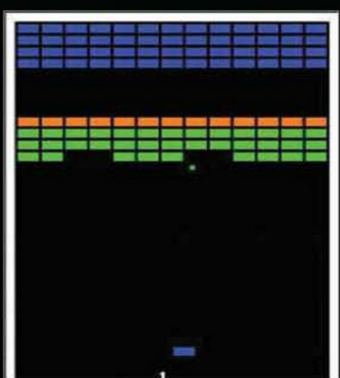


» 1991 saw the release of *Ghox*, a graphically superior clone with a ton of features and free roaming paddle



» 1994's surreal *Wiggie Waggie* bounced a brain off a skateboard to reveal a nuddy picture. Inspired!

"I RECALL MEETING STEVE [JOBS] ON THE SIDEWALK AND WE SIZED EACH OTHER UP BY THE PRANKS WE'D PULLED" STEVE WOZNIAK



» Still using colour overlays, at least *Super Breakout* can be fully emulated. It's hard as hell, though

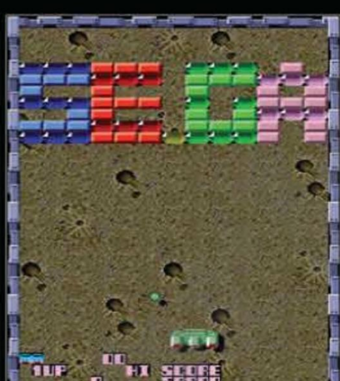
totally fresh designs, all done in four days and nights."

"So the Atari engineers that followed couldn't understand it. They had to redesign. It's possible that nothing of my own design made it into production; I'm not sure. The game was virtually identical as best I could remember. I never built a *Breakout* for myself from my own designs. I'm not even sure I took them with me. I never got a *Breakout* machine from Atari, but it is definitely the same game," remembers Woz, unsure why Atari never chose to learn more about his techniques, though without any hint of melancholy.

Had Atari taken the time to get to grips with his vanguard approach to digital logic, they might have pre-emptively stemmed the massive, worldwide piracy that plagued *Breakout* sales. "They should have called me back. I had no contact from people at Atari over *Breakout*. Steve may have kept me distant as he may not have paid me my fair share, although I don't hold it against him. I could have added a chip or two to make it more understandable or to explain my design. They would have been amazed once it was explained! My design would have been harder for any pirates to understand, so they would have been forced to copy it outright." Despite Atari's unwillingness to rethink its creative attitude, such a new and dynamic method of electronic engineering must have had an influence on Wozniak's future as a software and hardware developer.

"My head got in a very creative in-and-out-of-sleep mode during those four days and nights. I saw colour transparencies over parts of some arcade games that made it look like colours were changing. I suddenly thought up a clever digital method for creating NTSC colour while in this near sleep state, and it turned out later to be the heart of the Apple II."

Ultimately, of course, *Breakout* has been recreated for everything from mobile phones to the latest consoles 30 years after its remarkable conception because of one simple aspect: it's so much fun to play. Woz agrees: "It's a great game. It's a one-player *Pong*. I still like playing it on watches and iPods and everything. It's one of the most lasting computer games ever, like *Tetris*. That doesn't credit me, but rather Nolan Bushnell or whoever thought it up." Forgive me, Woz, for speaking for videogame players everywhere. We disagree: the credit is all yours.



» Sega's 1986 arcade game *Gigas* actually pre-empted the *Arkanoid* concept by a few months



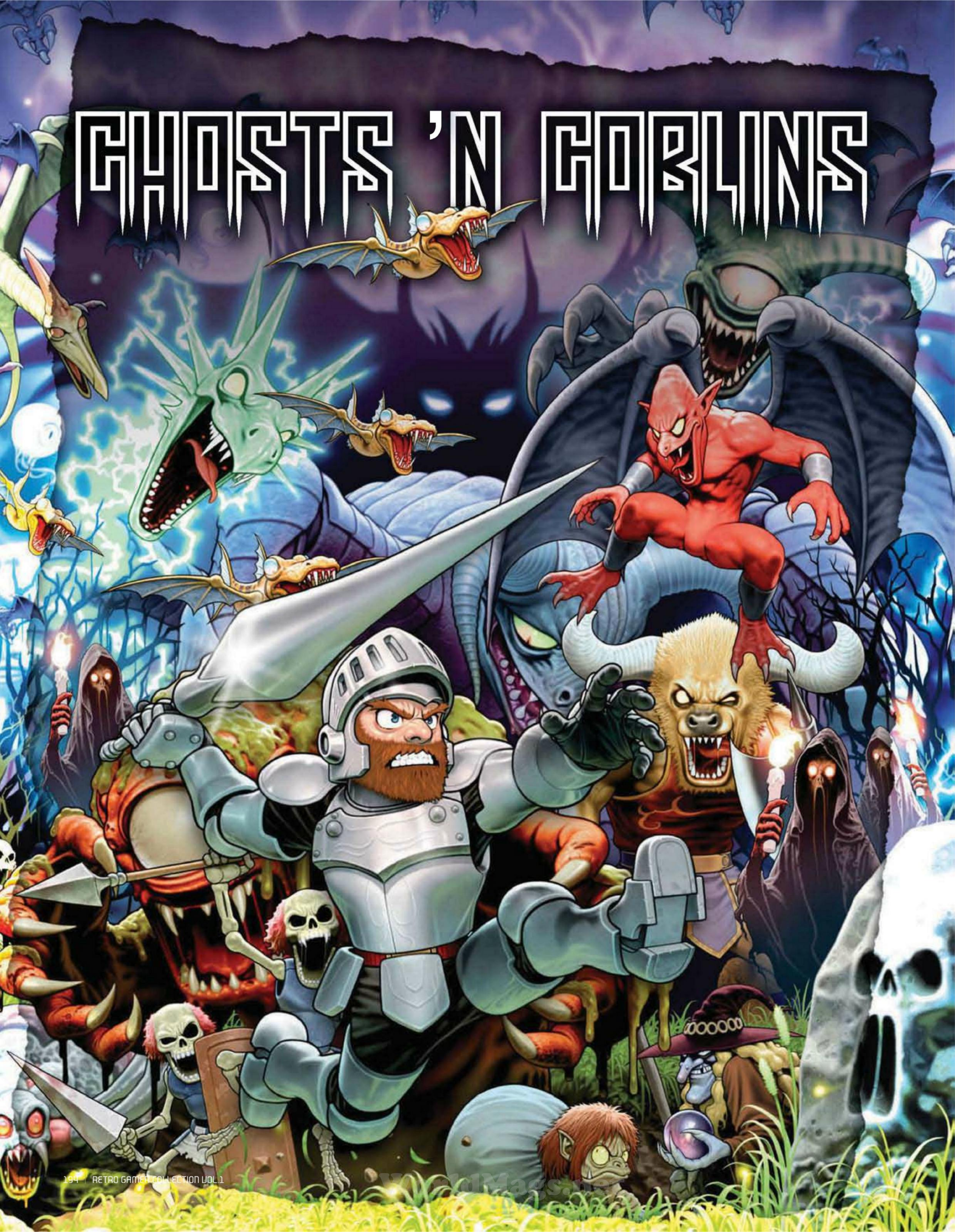
» *Quester* was Namco's 1987 extremely tuneful answer to *Arkanoid*. Look out for the cameos of Namco's characters

OFF THE WALL

Breakout clones are rife in all forms of electronic media, from iPods, through digital watches to mobile phones. Every possible variation has been experimented with, with many of them floating free around the internet. Some ten years after it was first released, the most successful and well-known reinvention of *Breakout* hit the arcades from industry legends Taito. *Arkanoid*, while retaining the same essential style of gameplay, managed to work a theme and back-story around the game. Its massive diversity of block formations, paddle upgrades and ball variations completely rejuvenated the bat 'n' ball genre. *Arkanoid* was converted for all major formats quickly, easily and very successfully; mainly due to the simplistic game engine at its core, making it an ideal candidate for a dynamic 8-bit game. Keep it simple, and they'll keep playing.



GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS





WITH A WHOLE NEW GENERATION OF GAMERS FINDING OUT THAT BEING REDUCED TO A COMEDIC PILE OF BONES IS JUST AS FUN ON A PSP TODAY AS IT WAS 21 YEARS AGO, SEAN SMITH TAKES A GOOD LOOK AT THE LEGENDARY GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS/MAKAIMURA SERIES, AND QUESTIONS TWO CAPCOM LEGENDS ABOUT THEIR MUCH-LOVED FRANCHISE...

These days, parents are terrified that their offspring will be influenced in a negative fashion by myriad atrocities found in the edgy, bloodthirsty, gangsta-themed videogame titles they somehow end up getting their mitts on. But back in 1985, this writer's parents didn't blink an eye after their wild-eyed son suddenly became obsessed with a hirsute knight in armour, who battled for the honour of his woman, generally while dressed in his shreddies. The knight was, of course, Arthur, and the semi-mythical King with whom he shared his name loosely influenced him. The girly-girl was Prin Prin, whose name is apparently an onomatopoeia for the sound made by a shapely female pair of buttocks. And the arcade game in which this motley crew first appeared was Capcom's 1985 classic, *Ghosts 'N Goblins*.

Few who were around 'back in the day' will forget their first impressions of the game. The tone that registered as you popped a coin into the slot, the introduction that sees an evil minion of Arthur's nemesis, Astaroth, snatch Princess Prin Prin away under cover of darkness, and the classy miniaturised map that shows your route through the game – in hindsight these are all touches the likes of which Capcom became famous for. And by the time the still stunning musical score had kicked in, you just knew you were sampling a triple-A slice of JAMMA action, a true piece of gaming history.



» A fully tooled up Art ready to pop a lance in someone's ass, *Namco X Capcom*

Ghosts 'N Goblins/*Makaimura* (English translation: the deceptively cute Demon World Village) was the brainchild of one Tokuro Fujiwara, a young game designer who had worked on early Capcom effort *Pirate Ship Higemaru*, and would go on to help create other vintage fare, such as *Commando* and *Exed Exes*, before the brilliantly realised jaunt through Demon World became a reality. We were lucky enough to speak with Fujiwara, as well as his esteemed colleague Hironobu Takeshita, a veteran of some 14 years of production work at Capcom, including overseeing its flagship RPG series, *Breath Of Fire*.

"*Makaimura* is a very special game for us, mainly because it marked the start of a brand new series", Fujiwara told us. And indeed, once people had sampled its delights, it was no surprise when this much-loved outing went on to spawn three official sequels, and numerous spin offs; more of which later. Capcom's opening gambit, an eye-popping battle between a valiant knight and the forces of the undead, was essentially a standard scrolling platformer, however it was set apart slightly in that it wasn't afraid to dip a toe into run-'n'-gun waters, with Arthur using projectile weaponry that could be changed by collecting icons bequeathed by offing certain ceramic pot-clutching enemies. The weapons each had their strengths and weaknesses, which gave the gameplay a sharp, tactical edge. Super-rapid throwing daggers could be used for efficiently peppering enemies that required multiple hits; fiery torches were generally avoided at all costs for their impractical, short-range napalm-carpet effect, whilst the axe was thrown in a slow, looping arc, great for those tricky flying foes.



» So this is why my mother always told me to wear clean kecks

The game itself looked wonderful, with vivid settings and detailed sprites that were brimming with characterisation; indeed many of the hellspawn Arthur was required to battle are instantly recognisable to gamers the world over



THE GAME ITSELF LOOKED WONDERFUL, WITH VIVID SETTINGS AND DETAILED SPRITES THAT WERE BRIMMING WITH CHARACTERISATION

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS



"WHEN I FIRST BEGAN THINKING ABOUT THE SORT OF GAME I WANTED TO MAKE I IMMEDIATELY LOOKED BACK TO MY CHILDHOOD FOR IDEAS" TOKURO FUJIWARA

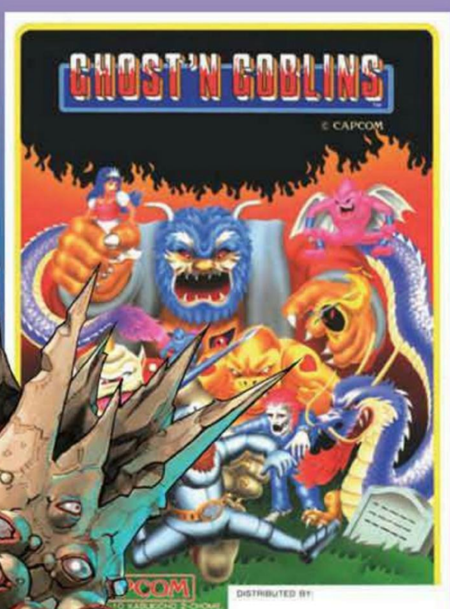


» He may have a face where most people have their, ahem, organs – but you wouldn't take the Michael

all these years on: the carnivorous plants that nonchalantly gob you to death while you're climbing precarious ladders; the crazy-looking, plunger-firing ghosties that attack en masse in the forest section; and the scary, two-headed head main honcho himself – every enemy was rendered with a great deal of panache. Arthur himself is now a Capcom icon, his suit of armour and legs-akimbo, arms-aloft leap having graced numerous other titles as well as his own. Then you have the loveable, cheeky, skull-tossing red gargoyle encountered at the midpoint of the first level who would go on to play a much bigger part in gaming history than anyone would expect… Fujiwara acknowledges their amusing, cutesy style, and hints toward his influences: "When I first began thinking about the sort of game I wanted to make I immediately looked back to my childhood for ideas – I imagined a game world filled with the sort of characters that had appeared in my favourite cartoons".



» You can't go anywhere these days without someone trying to sell you something



» The original game still looks stunning, be it the artwork or the sprites themselves





With enemies that differed in size, power and attack patterns for each level, the gameplay was frantic and for the most part almost impenetrably difficult. While it was a joy to take control of Arthur, the relentless, unpredictable attacks and unforgiving do-or-die jumping sections meant that only the most hardcore gamers were able to progress to the later stages of the game without pumping a wallet full of coinage into Capcom's cab. Mercifully, Arthur was clad in a suit of armour that could withstand one hit before he was reduced, somewhat hilariously, to his undercrackers. Take any more punishment however, and our bearded hero becomes reduced to a wonderfully animated pile of bones, his skull resting neatly on top.

Fast-forward 26 years, and sit an eight-year old kiddie, already scarred by trying hopelessly to beat *Viewtiful Joe*, in front of this kind of onslaught, and it would be a surprise if they survived half an hour of having their ass handed back to them by Astaroth and co. It really is that hard. That said, it was and still is an extremely rewarding experience, and when you finally make it to the end and rescue the Princess, you can be forgiven for a certain amount of macho posturing, knowing that you have aced one of the most notoriously nails-hard titles in the pantheon of arcade gaming.

Insane difficulty is something that has become synonymous with the *Makaimura* franchise in general. This isn't necessarily a bad thing; most gamers are quick to recognise that the gameplay is compulsive, and doesn't ever become too frustrating. Controlling Arthur can always potentially provoke some colourful language or controller abuse, but you can bet your bottom dollar you'll be back later on to track down Prin Prin. Was this was a ploy to make more money from the coin-chomping arcade machines, or just a sign of the gaming trends of the time? "As I'm sure you can appreciate, Arcade games first and foremost do need to earn money, but this was not our primary objective," continues Fujiwara. "It was not easy for us to earn enough cash and still make *Ghosts 'N Goblins* difficult enough for the more skilled gamers out there. Personally I feel that the final difficulty level was indicative of the time."

While the world waited patiently for a sequel, Capcom had licensed out *Ghosts 'N Goblins* to just about every home format imaginable, with varying degrees of success. The Nintendo Entertainment System was a fair effort, and sold well despite the fact that Capcom had raised the difficulty level to an







» Arthur faces off against the final boss in *Daimakaimura*. Wot, no Psycho Cannon?



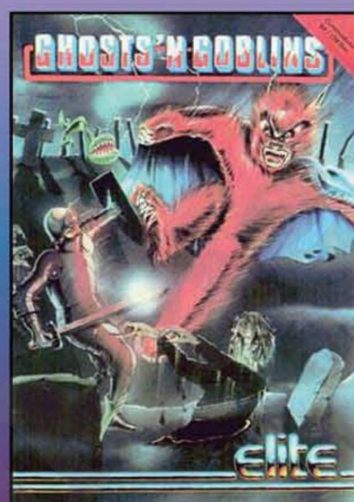
» The loveable fella at it again. This time on Game Boy

insane level, while the 8-bit home computers all got the conversion treatment, with each version standing out for different reasons. Lump together the gameplay of the Speccy, the graphics from the Amstrad and the cracking music from the C64 and you would have had probably the best arcade port of the time. Later on we saw more competent home versions for the Amiga, Atari ST and PC, while retro-heads on the move have been blessed with a Game Boy Color and even a Japanese mobile phone *Makaimura*.

Capcom gave us three years to master *Makaimura* before unleashing the sequel to astonished arcade goers in 1988. At this point the firm was slowly but surely honing its art and had produced some fine PCBs, such as *Black Tiger*, *Bionic Commando* and *Side Arms* on its older hardware, before introducing the Capcom Play System-1 (CPS1) board that very year. Debuting with *Forgotten Worlds*, the superior performance both graphically and sonically offered by the CPS1 was instantly apparent. *Daimakaimura*/*Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was the sophomore CPS1 release, and was instantly heralded as an improvement on the original, and a stunning game to boot. Arthur and his surroundings looked better than ever, with zombified grim reaper types being lanced into an impressive explosion of gore, leering vultures dissipating in a cloud of feathers, some awesome weather effects and boss sprites that made those in the original seem puny by comparison.

This was just the breathtaking first level and later stages proved to be just as impressive. Interestingly, Fujiwara's response was somewhat restrained when we mentioned that he must have been particularly proud of his work on *Daimakaimura*, to which he simply replied: "I am personally very happy with the way *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* turned out, very happy indeed." We at Retro Gamer are betting he felt like a God on Earth, such is our respect for his superb creation.

Gameplay was tweaked and little additions made the whole package feel far more polished and involved then before. Arthur could now fire vertically, and as well as being able to collect weaponry from fallen enemies, the landscape was littered with a number of treasure chests that would erupt out of the scenery, some of which were hidden and had to be found by way of a well-timed jump in a certain place. In true series tradition they could make or break the player. Opening the chests with some well-aimed projectiles could mean one of three occurrences – the reward of a new weapon, some shiny new golden armour, or, if you have lucked out, an evil, hostile wizard who turned you into a wizened old man or a duck, thus leaving you wide open to attack. The golden armour, when collected, gave Arthur a chargeable 'super' attack, which varied depending on which weapon was currently in his possession. These attacks ranged from a huge lightning bolt that cut a swathe both



» A nice conversion, which had some terrifying artwork

vertically and horizontally across the screen, to a spell that created a mirror-like clone of Arthur, effectively doubling his attack power. The addition of some extra weapons, and indeed the all-powerful new attacks, took the edge off the difficulty levels ever so slightly. That said, even the most battle-hardened games nutcases still find it tricky to negotiate the game in its entirety, particularly given the screw-job ending (see boxout). As with

THE PRODIGAL SON RETURNS

Capcom was chuffed when Fujiwara returned to the fold to work on *Gokumakaimura*. He had taken a sabbatical with his own firm WhoopeeCamp, where he made the PSOne platformer series *Tomba!/Tombi!*. "With *Ultimate G&G* we have been very fortunate that Fujiwara joined us on this project. Fujiwara is the director so his influence will be obvious for all to see," explain s Takashita. But it could have been so different: "Initially Capcom and Fujiwara wanted to create a new game altogether, though it was finally decided to create a new *Ghosts 'N Goblins* title. It is a historic franchise and we felt that only with Fujiwara as the director could we make a faithful sequel. And more importantly, Fujiwara wanted to create the title because there are lots of fans of the original game who have been waiting a very long time for a follow up to appear."



GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS



A KNIGHT'S TALE

Arthur has appeared in and even influenced other titles. He pops up as a particularly tough boss-fighting mofo in *DC* Psikyo/Capcom shooter *Gun Spike/Cannon Spike*, complete with space age suit of armour. He can even be called upon to deal out some striker-style punishment in *Marvel Vs Capcom*. When talk of a 3D *G&G* did the rounds on the cusp of the Noughties but came to nothing, it is believed that the idea eventually became *Maximo*. Takeshita acknowledges the fact that this may well have been the case: "The *Maximo* games were developed by a completely different team so it is quite difficult for me to comment. However, I don't think they were ever intended to be a spin off from the *G&G* franchise, but rather pay homage to it." Either way, the two budget *Maximo* titles are recommended to fans of the series, and, most importantly, do feel like they belong in Arthur's universe.



» 3D and PS2 but very much retro tinged romps. Get rummaging in those bargain bins

"FANS OF RED ARIIMAA WILL BE PLEASANTLY SURPRISED WHEN THEY FINALLY PLAY ULTIMATE GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS. AS FOR WHETHER A FUTURE CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION WILL FEATURE HIM, WHO KNOWS" TOKURO FUJIWARA



its predecessor, the gameplay never felt unfair, and it rightly joins the likes of *Super Mario World*, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* and *Castlevania IV* among the greatest old-school platformers of the 16-bit, or any other era.

The musical score was equally timeless, with a horror movie-like crescendo building, then giving way to the perfect theme we all know and love. Fujiwara obviously had a fine understanding of the atmosphere he wished to create. "Usually with background music staff would create several 'rough' pieces and we would then choose those that most mimicked the levels and gameplay as they appeared in our mind. From this point we would then produce the final version for each level. The most important thing was fine-tuning the balance between tempo and sound effect, which definitely affected the gameplay," he explains. It obviously worked, as even today there are adults walking around now, in their late twenties who use "the *G&G* music" as their mobile phone ringtone.

Rescuing Prin Prin from Loki was never going to be a pastime restricted to the arcades, and it found its way home, perhaps most impressively to the Sega Mega Drive, roughly one year after its release. Taking advantage of the similarity between the innards of the console and the CPS1 board itself, what ensued was a blinding port that would have sealed the deal for many prospective Mega Drive purchases in import shops around the UK. Superlative versions also popped up on the home computers once more, with a special mention going out to the C64 version, which had awesome Tim Follin-scored music. Conversions were also produced for the Sharp X68000, NEC Supergrafx, and Sega Master System.

Oh, and remember the little red fella who lobbed skulls at you in *Makaimura*, and pushed you to the limit in the castle section in *Daimakaimura*? He is invariably known as Firebrand in the West, or Red Arremer/Red Ariimaa in Japan. Well, in 1990, the crimson devil got his very own game. Fujiwara was involved in creating one of the most successful spin-offs ever imagined. *Red Ariimaa – Makaimura Gaiden*, or *Gargoyle's Quest* as it was known over here, was released on the Game Boy. An RPG-tinged platformer (imagine *G&G* crossed with *Zelda – The Adventures Of Link*) it went down well and remains one of the better titles for the monochrome handheld. An excellent sequel, *Red Ariimaa 2/Gargoyle's Quest II* was released two years later on the Famicom/NES. This sequel appeared on the Game Boy in 1993, and was known as *Gargoyle's Quest*



» The obscure 1999 Wonderswan title





» The mighty Gargoyle's Quest immediately starts off with an exciting fight with a giant dragon



» *Demon's Crest/Blazon* – quite simply one of the best SNES titles. So what if you are skint? Buy it – now



» Red Arremer regrets eating that Peperami Firestick multipack

II – The Demon Darkness. The little red scoundrel was not finished there, however, as in 1994, the magnificent *Demon's Blazon/Demon's Crest* was released for the SNES/SFC. It took the role-playing platform idea maintained so well in the earlier titles, and gave the package a lick of paint and some 16-bit steroids. Red Arremer could now travel around on a Mode-7-fuelled overworld map between some beautifully dark platform levels. The resultant experience was critically acclaimed upon release, receiving some rave reviews across the board, yet sold poorly. Capcom's talismanic gargoyle went on to appear as a super-tough unlockable boss in SNK Playmore's *SNK Vs Capcom: SVC Chaos*, and in the disappointing Japanese-only tactical RPG, *Namco X Capcom*, which also featured several other familiar *Makaimura*-centric characters. We mentioned to Takeshita that there are staff members on our magazine who would sell their grandparents for a sequel or re-release of the *Gargoyle* trilogy: "I think you and fellow fans of this character will be pleasantly surprised then when you finally play *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins*," he teases. "As for whether a future *Capcom Classics Collection* will feature him, who knows? You'll just have to wait and see…"

In the same way that *Daimakaimura* would have impressed many a gamer both aesthetically and as a great gaming experience when it appeared on Sega hardware, Capcom set out to achieve a similar reaction with the SNES exclusive *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts/Chomakaimura*, on the spanking new 16-bit Super Famicom in 1991. *Chomakaimura* was the best looking title in the series so far, and featured new weaponry, a whizzy new suit of armour that supercharged your projectiles whilst also allowing the obligatory charge attack, and all manner of stunning Mode 7 sprite scaling and tomfoolery. Musically the game was infused with gorgeous, orchestral arrangements that greatly enhanced the spooky atmosphere. The level designs were the most imaginative yet, and included the ubiquitous graveyard setting, a fabulous haunted pirate ship, the oesophagus of some horrible beast, and finally a showdown with the nemesis of the day and self-styled 'King Of Hell', Sardius. Despite some slowdown in places, *Chomakaimura* completed a trilogy of absolute belters for Capcom and remains the most-loved game in the franchise.

Apart from an original effort for Bandai's ill-fated Wonderswan handheld, the originally titled *Makaimura For Wonderswan*, the only significant appearances since by Arthur and the gang have been in retro compilations for the Saturn, PlayStation, and current gen machines. The Game Boy Advance received an arranged version of the SNES game, which had bosses from the original game and the opportunity to play through redesigned levels. Naturally, it was extremely hard. Capcom also released *Arthur No Astaroth: Nazomakaimura: Incredible Toons* for the PSOne and Saturn in 1996, a joint effort with developer Dynamix, and a *G&G*-themed take on its own *Incredible Machine* puzzler. A 3D *Makaimura* was mentioned in the brave new world of the N64 but never materialised. The lack of decent underpants-clad action has now, thankfully, come to an end with the release of *Goku Makaimura/Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins*. Reviewed elsewhere in this issue, the PSP game has appeared as though Fujiwara has tapped into the minds of *G&G* fans with some kind of ESP that only games geniuses can use, to come up with an RPG-tinged future-retro classic. What was the secret? How did he… know? "Actually some of the ideas were loosely formed in our minds and then we sat down, discussed them and they became more concrete. During this process we listened to fans of the series and created elements based on their ideas."

Right – so does this mean we may have more of the same to come? "I think that the appeal of platform games is that they provide a unique gameplay experience that you do not get from any other genre. Looking ahead, we will aim to deliver platform games with even more quality."

You can't say fairer than that.



» Bizarre game, but some brilliant cartoon artwork



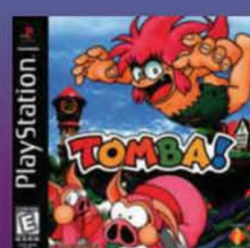
» The solitary NES outing for the solo Arremer



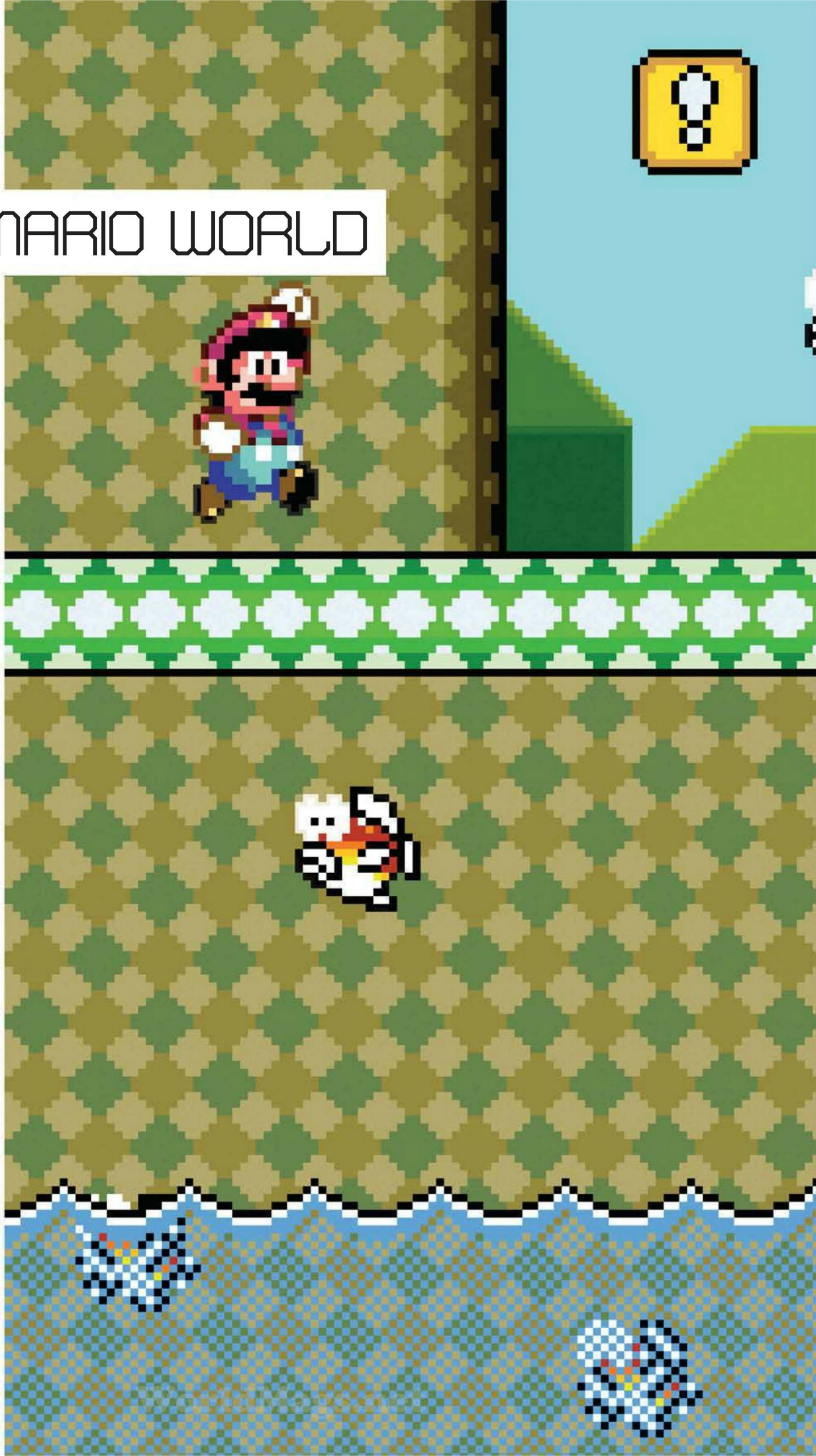
» Until we had PSPs, *Super G&G* was the best looking game in the series, unquestionably

CRUEL TO BE…

Makaimura games: tough as old boots, right? Well that isn't all. Completing the main trilogy of games initially proves to be a futile exercise. Nail *Astaroth*, and you are sent back to the start and asked to complete the game again, on a harder difficulty setting, beating the final bosses with the crappy crucifix weapon. Obliterate Loki, and you are sent away to obtain the Psycho Cannon weapon then return for some more. While *Chomakaimura* sees you having to return for Prin Prin's bracelet, for gawd sakes. Were Capcom cruel to us, Mr Fujiwara? "We never thought that we were being cruel when we were making the series – rather we were reacting to the desires of strong gamers to deliver titles that challenged their skills. Games should never be too easy, but on the other hand it is important that they are not so difficult that players cannot make progress and become frustrated."

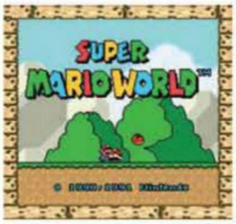


» Fujiwara's PSOne platformer. A little gem for fans of the platform role-player genre



SUPER MARIO WORLD

HAIL TO THE PLUMBER



- **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

Super Mario World is one of the finest videogames ever created. It's just fact. Characters, structure, level design, humour, the perfect learning curve… all flawless. As anyone who has reached the Holy Grail of 96 exits will tell you, you'd be hard pressed to find a better platform game anywhere, be it from Nintendo's back catalogue or not.

The story is your usual *Mario* hokum – something to do with missing eggs, a captured Princess and Bowser in a big teacup – but that's not the point. From the absolute get go, *Super Mario World* is a constant learning experience. Every time you think you've mastered all it has to give, it throws something new at you and opens up countless more play possibilities.

The first of these, and by far the most memorable, is the introduction of a now very famous character into the *Mario* universe – the loveable green Dinosaur known as Yoshi. As soon as that tongue popped out of his smiley mouth, accompanied by what can only be described as 'the greatest noise of all time', we knew Yoshi was big news. Turns out we were right, he's still going strong today and is now almost as recognisable as the moustachioed one himself.

Along with the little green chap, we were treated to flight via a feather power-up, a natty new spin jump that could destroy blocks beneath you, and a host of secrets and extras that kept SNES owners scratching their heads for months. And goombas with parachutes. Never forget them.

My one residing memory of this Miyamoto classic has to be one of the very earliest levels. Set high up in the sky, with shifting and swinging platforms, a constantly scrolling screen and crazy music that sits somewhere between the mushroom kingdom and deliverance. The trick was to hold right on the pad and time your jumps so you could do the whole thing without stopping once. Satisfaction guaranteed.







Year Released: 1990 (JAPAN) 1991 (USA) 1992 (UK)

Original Price: £149.99 (INCLUDING SUPER MARIO WORLD)

Buy it now for: £20+

Associated Magazines: Nintendo Magazine System, Superplay, Total, N-Force, SNES Force

Why the SNES was great… Nintendo's 16 bit powerhouse represents the true 'Golden Age' of videogaming as the likes of Konami, Squaresoft and even Nintendo itself have arguably never been on better form than when designing games for this machine. The best SNES releases featured both flawless gameplay and graphics, and set a high benchmark for quality entertainment software that, in many cases, endures to this day.



SNES

BY RELEASING THE SUPER NES A YEAR LATER THAN ITS NEAREST RIVALS, NINTENDO FACED THE DAUNTING TASK OF CONVERTING A GENERATION OF GAMERS TO ITS NEW CONSOLE. IT COULD HAVE GONE HORRIBLY WRONG BUT, AS ASHLEY DAY RECALLS, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IF YOU HAVE THE BEST GAMES

With a NES in 30 per cent of American homes and the word 'Famicom' synonymous with videogames in Japan, Nintendo was understandably reluctant to release a successor to its best-selling console and chose to support the ageing 8-bit console for as long as it could. It was, however, only a matter of time before the advance of technology allowed Nintendo's competition to take the lead and by 1988 both NEC's PC Engine and Sega's Mega Drive offered a far more powerful entertainment experience. Nintendo could no longer rest on its laurels and secretly began work on its next 'Family Computer': the Super Famicom.

The 16-bit-system had been developed and designed by Masayuki Uemura, who had spent months attempting to make the Super Famicom backwards compatible with Famicom cartridges, but had found that the massive leap in technology had set Nintendo's machine so far in advance of its predecessor that building in Famicom compatibility would have been far too costly. Without backwards compatibility to bridge the transition between consoles, Nintendo would need an irresistible launch line-up to tempt existing Famicom owners to upgrade. Knowing this, Nintendo's president, Hiroshi Yamauchi needed his best man on the job and, as soon as development of *Super Mario Bros 3* was complete, he charged Shigeru Miyamoto and his 30-man team with the task of exploring the new hardware's game-playing capabilities.

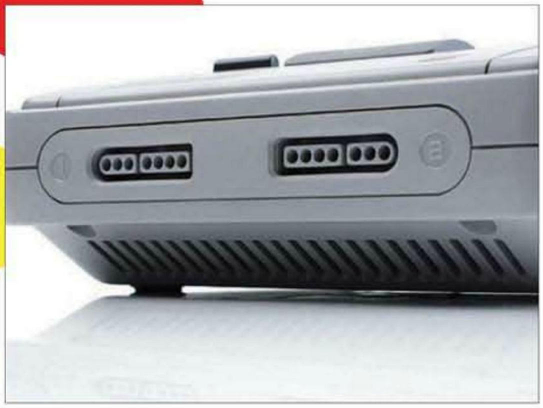
One of the biggest tricks that the hardware had up its sleeve was the now infamous Mode 7: a graphical hardware mode that allowed sprites to zoom in and out, and rotate in a way that simulated a 3D depth-of-field effect. Neither the Mega Drive nor PC Engine was

To CD or not CD

Wishing to exploit the advantages of the growing CD-ROM medium, Nintendo had planned a SNES CD-ROM drive from as early as 1988 and had courted both Sony and Philips with the proposal. The fruits of those early endeavours were a series of Nintendo licensed games for the Philips CDI and a prototype add-on from Sony that was eventually developed into the PlayStation we know today. If Nintendo had not backed out of the SNES/PlayStation partnership then the videogame landscape would be unrecognisable and this RetroInspection might tell the tale of a very different console. It is unclear how many games were in development for the SNES-CD, but we do know that *Secret Of Mana* was originally CD-based with a planned branching story. The game had to be dramatically cut back to fit on cartridge: a process that was instrumental in convincing Squaresoft to move *Final Fantasy VII* from N64 to PlayStation.



» *Secret Of Mana* originally started off as a CD title, complete with branching storylines







» The Japanese packaging evoked a playful image that was missing from the mature design of the console



» The SNES Jr made it to the USA, but its rarity makes it much easier to find the Japanese version

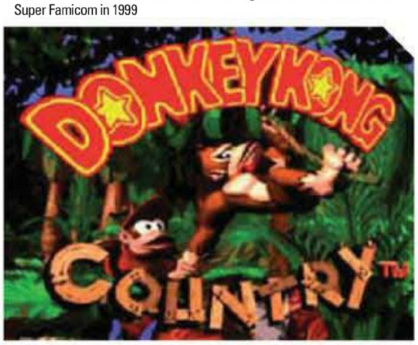
capable of sprite scaling on such a level, so Nintendo decided that the first three Super Famicom games would take advantage of the innovative feature. After 15 solid months of R&D, Miyamoto and Co would begin work on *F-Zero*, *Pilotwings* and *Super Mario Bros 4*, which would all use Mode 7 to varying degrees. However, with only ten months until launch day, the team was only able to complete two of the games on time and *Pilotwings* (the most technically demanding of the three) slipped by a month.

By 20 November 1990, Japanese demand for Nintendo's new console had reached fever-pitch and any worries that the machine would fail to entice existing Famicom owners were washed away. Demand for the console was so high that, for example, the Hankyu department store in Osaka had to stop taking pre-orders only a week after they started. In retrospect, the release of the Super Famicom heralded the age of hysteria that has defined every hardware launch to this day. By 20 November, total pre-orders numbered in excess of 1.5 million yet only 300,000 machines shipped. Fearing that several Yakuza groups planned to hijack the Super Famicom shipment, to sell on at artificially inflated prices, Nintendo commenced 'Operation Midnight Shipping' in which the entire batch of 300,000 machines were hauled across Japan in the very early hours of the 20 November. Thanks to these dramatic efforts, the launch was a rousing success: the Super Famicom sold out in seconds, even with only two launch titles. Yet when one of those titles was the sequel to the best-selling game of all time, success was a certainty. Despite being the least technically demanding of the Super Famicom's launch titles it was *Super Mario Bros 4: Super Mario World* that shifted the machine. *Super Mario World* expanded on its predecessors by offering finely tuned platforming gameplay, beautiful pastel graphics and a staggering 79 levels. The game is still remembered, 16 years on, as the best 2D platform game of all time so it is no surprise that Nintendo relied on it to push sales of its console.

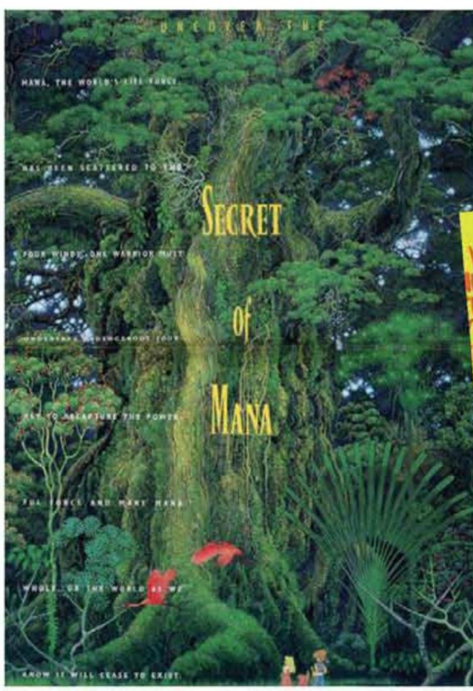
When it came time to introduce the renamed Super Nintendo Entertainment System to the UK (a typical 17 months after the Japanese release), Nintendo made the bold decision to bundle *Super Mario World* with every SNES console. Making for one of the best freebies of all time, *Mario* helped to move many a SNES into British living rooms that summer, but arriving two years after the Mega Drive proved very costly. Sega's black beauty was phenomenally popular in Europe (thanks to its exclusive sports simulations and arcade conversions) and left little room for competition. It wasn't until Christmas of 1992 that the tide truly began to turn, thanks to Capcom's *Street Fighter II*. The original arcade game had spawned a worldwide craze, the likes of which had not been seen since the days of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, and whichever home console netted a conversion first would benefit from a serious rise in sales. Sure enough, Nintendo managed to snag Capcom's seminal brawler a full year before Sega and stole a significant slice of the UK market in the process. A pattern



» *Fire Emblem: Thracia 776* was one of the last games to be released for the Super Famicom in 1999



» *Donkey Kong Country* used Rare's Advanced Computer Modelling to create previously inconceivable visuals on the ageing SNES

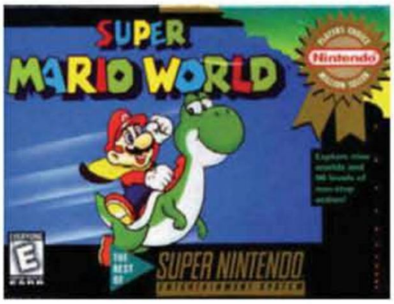


» An enigmatic two-page advert for *Secret Of Mana* that bravely chose not to use screenshots

» **Right:** The Super Game Boy allowed GB games to be played on a TV set and expanded the SNES library by thousands. **Below:** An advert for the surprisingly decent SNES conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha 2*















» **Top left and right:** By tying the release of *Super Mario World* to the SNES, Nintendo ensured great success for its new console. The Mode 7 effects in *F-Zero* really showed off the power of the Super Nintendo. **Bottom left and right:** *Star Fox* (renamed *Star Wing* in the UK) used extra hardware to push the SNES beyond its limitations. By arriving so late in the console's life, *Yoshi's Island* went tragically unnoticed



A room with a Satellaview

The Satellaview has such an unusual history that we could fill a RetroInspection on this intriguing add-on alone. The device allowed the Super Famicom to acquire games from St Giga: a popular Japanese satellite service. At prescheduled times the service would broadcast a chosen game, which could then be downloaded onto a flash cart and played offline. The service was discontinued in 2000 but it is still possible to find flash carts with games saved to them. These extreme rarities should be of particular interest to Nintendo fans as the service featured exclusive versions of classic Nintendo games including *Zelda*, *Famicom Wars*, *Fire Emblem* and *Excitebike*. There was even a text based sequel to *Chrono Trigger* (known as *Radical Dreamers*) and some games, like the satellite version of *A Link To The Past*, could only be played at certain times of day because the Satellaview broadcast live voice-acting into the game.

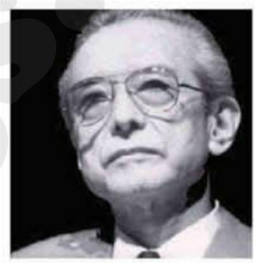
was starting to form: although Sega's success was assured by its in-house conversions and its relationship with EA, it was Nintendo's SNES that turned the most heads by continually providing the classiest most desirable games. It started with *Mario* and *Street Fighter*, and continued through *Zelda*, *Secret Of Mana*, *Axelay*, *Super Mario Kart* and hundreds of other top-drawer games that would go on to steal the hearts of hardcore and casual gamers alike.

As the years went by and more powerful competitors (like the 3DO and Jaguar) fell by the wayside, the SNES' excellent range of software continued to impress with the aid of Nintendo's quality control and, when it became apparent that the console was beginning to show its age, Nintendo built partnerships with third-party developers to find new ways of making its games look next generation even if the original hardware wasn't. The first of these partnerships came about when the UK's Argonaut Software impressed Nintendo by programming the monochrome Game Boy to display full 3D graphics. On the strength of the Game Boy title, two of Argonaut's employees, Giles Goddard and Dylan Cuthbert, achieved what few British coders have and secured positions at Nintendo's Kyoto headquarters. There they developed the Mario Chip (later renamed Super FX), a cartridge-embedded co-processor that would allow the SNES to display true 3D polygonal visuals for the first time. The first Super FX game they created, with the legendary design talents of Shigeru Miyamoto, was *Star Fox*: an astounding 3D space combat game that wowed SNES owners of 1993, who couldn't believe the console was capable of such graphics. The following year another incredibly talented UK software house found a way to push the SNES beyond its preconceived limits. Rare, who had previously pushed the ZX Spectrum much further than anyone thought possible, had been using Silicon Graphics workstations to test concepts for Nintendo's next console: the Ultra 64. In doing so they discovered a way of using high-quality pre-rendered graphics on the humble SNES, which they used to create the beautiful *Donkey Kong Country* and an arcade conversion of the previously Ultra 64 bound *Killer Instinct*. With the PlayStation and the Saturn on the horizon, the startling looks of Rare and Argonaut's games must have made the SNES a very tempting reason to not upgrade.

Nintendo's luck couldn't last forever though and, despite pushing the hardware to its limits, sales of the SNES slowed to a trickle in the UK – due in no small part to the globe-consuming success of the PlayStation. Nevertheless, like all good consoles, the SNES was due a last hurrah and got it in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. The gorgeous platform game used a combination of Mode 7 and the Super FX2 chip to pump out some of the best effects the SNES had ever seen, and with the classic Nintendo gameplay it became one of the console's most-loved titles. The gloriously beautiful platform game proved that the Super Nintendo was far from dead but was sadly lost in the excitement of the new era of 3D games and the hype surrounding *Super Mario 64*. Though it attained outstanding critical acclaim, *Yoshi's Island* was a commercial flop in the UK and was one of the last significant SNES titles to see a European release alongside *Donkey Kong Country 3* and *Street Fighter Alpha 2* in December 1996.

As is typical of Japanese consoles, the native Super Famicom lived on much longer than the Western SNES thanks to continued hardware support and a greater demand for software. The Satellaview (see boxout) broadcasted new Super Famicom games directly into players' homes from 1995 to 2000 and, in doing so, kept the large user base active. A new hardware model was introduced in 1998: the Super Famicom Jr was a smaller, sleeker unit that was affordably priced as an alternative to the N64 and allegedly small enough to be sold in street vending machines. Top-quality games continued to be released until 2000, with *Fire Emblem: Thracia 776* and a series of *Picross* titles being the most noteworthy.

Production of the Super Famicom finally ceased in late 2003, which may seem like a good innings until you consider that production of the original Famicom was discontinued in the same year. Regardless, throughout its 13-year lifespan, the SNES/Super Famicom achieved widespread success and adoration thanks to Nintendo's willingness to keep the machine alive through groundbreaking hardware expansions and a virtually limitless string of superb releases.



» Hiroshi Yamauchi was the head of Nintendo for 53 years and was instrumental to its early success



SNES



PERFECT TEN GAMES

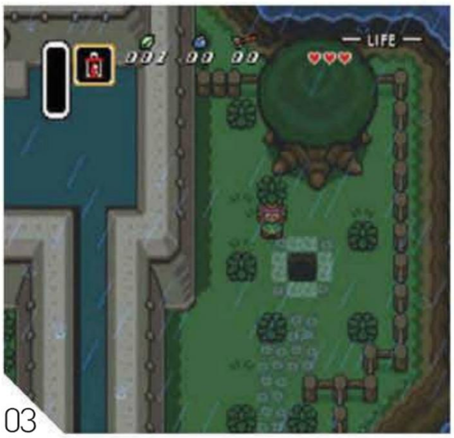
This has been one of the hardest top tens to put together, a fitting tribute to the fact that Nintendo's SNES had a phenomenal amount of great games available for it. Before you write in though, any top ten is going to be entirely subjective and, of course, open to violent debate, and that's what Retro Gamer is all about. Like-minded gamers indulging in sheer nostalgia. Bring it on



01



02



03



04

SUPER MARIO KART

- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO BROS

01 We've been playing the original *Super Mario Kart* on and off now for a staggering 13 years, and it still remains fresher than a baker's dozen that's just popped out the oven. Meticulously designed circuits, a well-balanced range of weapons – including the greatly missed feather – and impressive visuals proved perfectly that there was so much more to everyone's favourite plumber than simply jumping on wayward Koopas. While the cups provided plenty of fun, it was the stunning time trial mode and sublime multi-player games that kept us constantly going back for just one more go. Thank god *Retro Gamer* wasn't around at the time of *Mario Kart*'s release; we'd have never got any of our work finished on time!

SUPER METROID

- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **CREATED BY:** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BADVANCE WARS DS

02 *Super Metroid* is a game that works on a variety of levels, making it immensely re-playable. While some marvelled at its motherly themes, stunningly created environments and remarkable attention to detail, others were simply impressed with the sheer amount of crap you could blow up in it. Regardless of how you feel about Samus's only 16-bit adventure, there's no denying that *Super Metroid* remains a staggering achievement that perfectly combines the rush of shooting huge bosses with the wonder of exploring vast new areas like no other SNES game around. Little wonder then that it took Nintendo eight years to come up with a sequel that could do it justice.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME

03 There's no denying the superiority of *Ocarina Of Time*, but *A Link To The Past* remains a wonderfully accomplished adventure that deserves to sit proudly in every SNES owner's collection. Every dungeon you explore is crafted to perfection, and while they start off easy, you'll soon be scratching your head over Miyamoto's deviously designed puzzles. The many weapons you discover are well balanced and every encountered boss is a masterstroke in design. Then, of course, you have the two unique worlds that Link can eventually switch between, thus making an already sprawling game even larger. Quite simply one of the finest 16-bit adventures ever made.

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- » **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

04 Konami released some outstanding titles for Nintendo's 16-bit wonder, but this cracking effort from 1992 is arguably one of its best efforts. Each level is a rollercoaster ride of destruction and featured the SNES hardware on fine form. Sprites are full of detail, the game's many bosses a joy to behold, and there's a ridiculous amount of Mode 7 trickery going on. Add in a fantastic, stomping soundtrack, an awesome array of different weapons and some groovy overhead levels (that can be rotated with the left and right triggers) and you have a run-'n'-gun title that would be essential on any format.

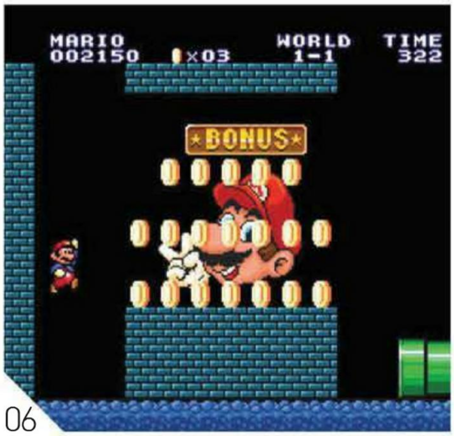
AXELAY

- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- » **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRADIUS III

05 There's a host of great shooters available for the SNES, but few can compare to the brilliance that is Konami's stunning *Axelay*. From its quasi-3D levels to its utterly amazing music, every moment of *Axelay* is exhilarating to play through. While the level design and available weapons are worthy of praise, it's the immense, striking bosses the game constantly throws at you that truly astound. Huge metallic spiders, colossal ED-209 styled mechs and a gigantic lava creature are just a few of the mayors you have to deal with and each is breathtaking to behold. Why's it's never been released on the GBA we'll never know…



05



06



07



08



09



10

SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

06 **What's better than three classic *Mario NES* outings on one cartridge? Why, three *Mario NES* games with improved aesthetics and a fourth exclusive title that had only originally appeared in Japan, of course!** *All-Stars'* triple whammy of *Super Mario Bros 1, 2* and *3* made it incredible value for money and were great examples of taking old games and updating them for a newer platform. Add in *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*, which was effectively a tougher version of the original game and allowed you to choose from either brother, and you had an amazingly comprehensive software package. Finally, if you bought the version that came boxed with a SNES you received *Super Mario World* on the cartridge. Absolute bargain!

CHRONO TRIGGER

- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SQUARESOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** SQUARESOFT
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FINAL FANTASY X

07 **It would have been all too easy to go with Squaresoft's *Secret Of Mana*, so we've decided to focus on this little beauty instead.** While Squaresoft's epic RPG borrows plenty of ideas from the *Final Fantasy* series, you just can't help but be impressed by the sheer amount of love that has gone into crafting this astonishing RPG. Although the central storyline is fairly predictable, it soon begins to twist and turn all over the place and introduces plenty of memorable characters and sub plots. The combat system is a joy to use and the use of sound throughout is outstanding. It all combines to create one of the most engrossing RPGs we've ever played. Utterly essential.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA II

- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** CAPCOM
- » **CREATED BY:** CAPCOM
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

08 **Capcom's second *Alpha* title was released late in the SNES's life and, as a result, was sadly overlooked by a great many gamers who had moved on to the newer, flashier consoles.** Their loss was our gain, however, as it's easily one the best brawlers on Nintendo's 16-bit wonder. Great-looking sprites, a solid roster of characters, new moves, plenty of additional animation and thumping good gameplay made *Alpha II* a winner. We've no idea why the first game didn't appear on the SNES, but Capcom more than made up for it with this excellent sequel. An outstanding fighter that deserves to be in everyone's SNES collection.

PILOTWINGS

- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DONKEY KONG

09 **The Mode 7 chip was used in countless numbers of SNES games, but never was its appearance more noticeable than in the wondrous *Pilotwings*.** Taking control of a budding pilot, all the game required you to do was master licences for four different events: Skydiving, Rocketbelt, Light Plane and Hang Glider. While some of *Pilotwings'* events could be tricky to get to grips with, the elation you felt when they were finally mastered more than made up for it. Thanks to the excellent Mode 7 effects, the sense of scale you encountered as you flew through the air was breathtaking, and wait until you finally get to use the hang glider… marvellous.

UMIHARA KAWASE

- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NHK
- » **CREATED BY:** TNN
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHIJOU SAIKYOU LEAGUE SERIE A: ACE STRIKER

10 **It seems only fair to put at least one quirky Japanese title in the top ten, so our vote goes to the delightful *Umihara Kawase*.** Taking control of an adorably cute little girl, the aim of each stage is simple – avoid the bizarre fishy enemies and reach the door on each exit. Of course, said exit is often out of reach, and with your little tyke not being that great a jumper she has to rely on a handy elastic rope to get her around. Think *Bionic Commando* but with some decent rope physics thrown into the mix, and you have a good idea of what to expect with this often overlooked little gem.







SNES and the rest...

Nintendo's 16-bit console was an absolute powerhouse of a machine and supported an amazing array of different genres. From hit arcade conversions to the incredibly obscure, the SNES had something for everyone

01 ACTRAISER
02 SUPER GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS
03 THE FIREMEN
04 KILLER INSTINCT
05 DONALD DUCK
06 SUPER BOMBERMAN
07 THE ADVENTURES OF BATMAN & ROBIN
08 MAGIC SWORD
09 CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WAR
10 GANBARE GOEMON 2
11 SHADOWRUN
12 TERRANIGMA
13 MEGA MAN X
14 CANNON FODDER
15 SUPER METROID
16 POCKY & ROCKY
17 DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
18 JOE & MAC
19 PILOTWINGS
20 TETRIS BATTLE GAIDEN
21 SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS
22 ALADDIN
23 BREATH OF FIRE
24 GOKUJOU PARODIUS
25 STUNT RACE FX
26 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
27 SIM CITY
28 STARWING
29 FIRST SAMURAI
30 ARKANOID: DOH IT AGAIN
31 BLACK THORNE
32 PRINCE OF PERSIA
33 CACOMA KNIGHT
34 SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2: TURBO 'HYPER FIGHTING
35 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
36 FINAL FIGHT GUY
37 MICKY MANIA
38 SUPER MARIO WORLD
39 CYBERNATOR
40 LEMMINGS
41 ACTRAISER
42 BATTLETOADS & DOUBLE DRAGON: THE ULTIMATE TEAM
43 THE CHAOS ENGINE
44 MR DO!
45 SECRET OF MANA
46 SUPER SMASH TV
47 DARIUS TWIN
48 SUPER TENNIS
49 UNIRALLY
50 ASTERIX & OBELIX
51 SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV
52 BURAI
53 PLOK!
54 R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING
55 THUNDER SPIRITS
56 UMIHARA KAWASE
57 EARTHBOUND
58 INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER
59 RENDERING RANGER
60 SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS
61 U.N. SQUADRON
62 THE LORD OF THE RINGS
63 TOP GEAR
64 AXELAY
65 DEMON'S CREST
66 NINJA GAIDEN TRILOGY
67 SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!
68 F-ZERO
69 SUPER STAR WARS
70 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME
71 ART OF FIGHTING 2
72 CAPTAIN COMMANDO
73 SUPER MARIO KART
74 GRADIUS III
75 BATTLE CARS
76 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND
77 THE SIMPSONS: BART'S NIGHTMARE
78 BIO METAL
79 THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
80 EARTHWORM JIM
81 CLAY FIGHTER 2
82 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
83 SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2: THE NEW CHALLENGERS
84 THE KING OF DRAGONS
85 MICRO MACHINES
86 DAZE BEFORE CHRISTMAS
87 WILD GUNS

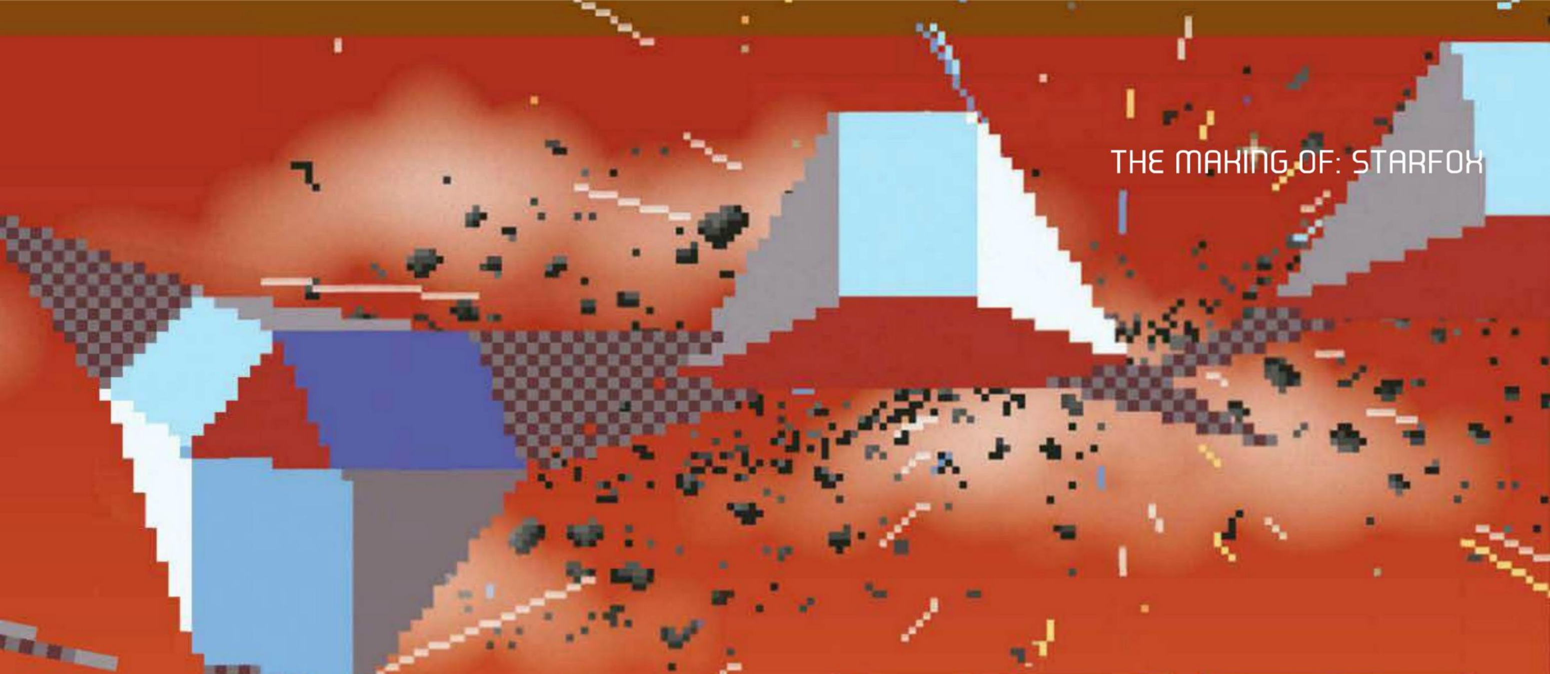



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ITALY
BRAZIL
SARLACC PIT MONSTER
NINTENDO
RESTAURANT
CREDIT 02

STARFOX

Starfox was Nintendo's first foray into the world of 3D and began a million-selling franchise that is renowned worldwide. However, Nintendo couldn't have done it without the assistance of Argonaut Software – a small UK developer with a flair for all things three-dimensional. Damien McFerran investigates how British technological know-how helped the Japanese giant reach new heights





In these days of ultra-realistic graphical plenty it's all too easy to forget that for console gamers, 3D visuals didn't really become par for the course until the advent of the 32-bit technology in the mid-Nineties. However, developers had been successfully dabbling with the third dimension for some years previously, mainly on the powerful Western 16-bit home computers like the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga. One such company was UK-based Argonaut Software, brainchild of teenage programming genius Jez San.

Founded in 1982, Argonaut impressed with early 3D hits, such as the groundbreaking *StarGlider* titles and the ambitious air combat simulator *Birds Of Prey*, but it's the company's association with Nintendo's popular *StarFox* brand that granted it worldwide fame.

EAST MEETS WEST

As the Eighties came to a close, Argonaut turned its attention to the rapidly emerging console market and, more specifically, what kind of 3D games could be successfully achieved on the current crop of Japanese systems. The most obvious options were the then-unstoppable Nintendo Entertainment System and the newly released portable Game Boy. After his team had familiarised themselves with the hardware (going as far as to reverse-engineer a Game Boy, as you do), San approached Nintendo of Japan with the proposal of exploring the possibility of producing 3D titles for its machines. To say Nintendo was receptive to the idea would be something of an understatement, as San himself recalls: "They immediately flew me to Japan to meet with them. They hired us to do a few 3D games, starting with the Japan exclusive *Eclipse* on the Game Boy, which became *Lunar Chase*. Then we started doing *StarGlider* on the NES, which was codenamed *NesGlider*." Argonaut's craftsmanship in the third dimension immediately impressed Nintendo – it was rumoured that the Japanese giant had been trying to produce 3D visuals on the NES for a while (with largely unsatisfactory results) and was keen to ensure that it, and not emerging rivals Sega, was the first to fully exploit the possibilities of console-based 3D titles. Having distinguished themselves with flying colours, San and his team were then introduced to what would prove to be the next generation of Nintendo greatness: "During our work, Nintendo showed us its new console. We immediately started



» Andross has plenty of nasty machines intent on scraping your Arwing's paintwork



» 'Punch it, Cheewie!'



» If this wasn't inspired by *Return of the Jedi*, we'll eat our feet

THEY SAID...



"THE GAMEPLAY ITSELF IS TOTALLY OUTSIDE THE SPHERE OF MOST OTHER SUPER NES GAMES... STARFOX IS CLEARLY THE MOST AMBITIOUS AND ACCOMPLISHED PROJECT YET ATTEMPTED ON THE SUPER NES, AND A MILESTONE IN CONSOLE 3D GAMES" ANGUS SWAN, NINTENDO MAGAZINE SYSTEM



THE MAKING OF... STARFOX

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Due to the fact that German developer Ariolasoft had already published a game called *Starfox* on the C64 in 1987, Nintendo was forced to retitle its game *Starwing* for the European markets to avoid copyright infringement. Although it didn't sound quite as catchy, the new moniker was bearable – unlike the successive N64 version which was confusingly rechristened *Lylat Wars* (surely *Starwing 64* would have been a better choice?). Thankfully, by the time the GameCube appeared, such silliness was forgotten and *StarFox Adventures* and *StarFox Assault* were not renamed. However, it's somewhat ironic that just as European gamers were granted *StarFox* games under their proper titles, the quality took something of a dive – *StarFox Adventures* (coded by Rare – the final game it would produce before being bought by Microsoft) was a disappointing 3D platform adventure that actually started life as an unrelated title called *Dinosaur Planet*; and *StarFox Assault* (developed by Namco) was an uninspiring multi-player combat game with passable flying sections but poor on-foot combat. Luckily, the recent DS title, *StarFox: Command* has proven to be a worthy addition to the Starfox franchise.



"I SUGGESTED WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO DESIGN A 3D CHIP THAT COULD DO PROPER 3D GRAPHICS" JEZ SAN



» For level three, only double-hard space foxes need apply

moving over to the Super NES and *StarFox* was born."

DEVELOPMENT

The first challenge Argonaut faced was power, or rather the lack of it. Although it was the cutting-edge of console technology, at its core the SNES (like its 16-bit rival the Sega Mega Drive) was primarily designed with 2D games in mind. Sensing this, San proposed a revolutionary concept: "I suggested the idea that while developing 3D games for Nintendo we might be able to design a 3D chip that would make its game console the first one capable of doing proper 3D graphics." This would ultimately lead to the birth of the Super FX chip. Nintendo was enthused by the notion of granting the SNES a little 3D muscle and wasted no time in putting the wheels in motion, as San remembers: "It jumped at the chance and financed the creation of the MARIO chip (Mathematical Argonaut Rotation I/O chip), which was designed by Rob Macaulay and Ben Cheese (who sadly succumbed to cancer in 2001), and was later renamed Super FX." With the assistance of this chip the SNES was able to produce and manipulate complex (for the time at least) real-time 3D visuals and effects. Super FX was to be integrated into the cartridge itself. This meant that SNES owners would not be required to purchase an additional peripheral (as was the case with the ill-fated Sega Mega CD and 32X devices) in order to experience the game, but it did result in a slightly higher price point than other SNES releases. It was a smart move that meant every SNES owner had the opportunity to experience this technical marvel, even if it did mean having to extort a few extra quid out of long-suffering parents to do so.

Developing *StarFox* was a learning experience for San and his team, and they quickly had to acclimatise themselves to the rather unusual working practices of their new mentor – the legendary creator of the best-selling *Mario* and *Zelda* franchises, Shigeru Miyamoto. "Working with Miyamoto presents a large learning curve, but can also be a very different proposition compared to others," remarks San. "He doesn't like to design games in advance. He subscribes to the 'try something, then keep tuning, then try something else' approach to game design. It means that he's completely in the loop at all stages, which can become a bottleneck. He doesn't like to do planning. He's very much a 'seat of the pants' kind of guy." Despite the unorthodox methods of game design witnessed by the Argonaut team while coding alongside Nintendo's golden boy, the encounter was, as San is swift to point out, an extremely positive one: "I have enormous respect for his talents. He's an amazing guy, and very humble. But the way he likes to work is very different than most people and it takes a lot of getting used to".

Links between the two companies were forged and Argonaut was forced to 'go native' to ensure work with its new partner progressed as smoothly as possible. "We had a small office inside Nintendo," says San. "We put several of our London staff – Dylan Cuthbert, Krister Wombell, Giles Goddard and later Colin Reed – permanently into Nintendo's offices in Kyoto, working directly for Miyamoto. I would regularly fly over to Japan to spend time with him. We did most of the technology back in England with a relatively large engineering/tech team, which comprised of Carl Graham and Pete Warnes on the software-based 3D technology and Ben Cheese, Rob



» Going where no fox has gone before...



» Some of the bosses are enough to make you mess your y-fronts



» Switching to first-person view briefly reveals the lovely cockpit area (furry dice just out of shot)



» The training mode allows you to get to grips with the basic controls

Macaulay and James Hakewill working on the hardware side of things. All the direct gameplay work was done inside Miyamoto's offices in Kyoto. Therefore we had two teams working closely with each other in two different countries."

While Argonaut primarily handled the technical duties, Miyamoto and his team, led by director Katsuya Eguchi, performed the artistic magic Nintendo was famed for. "We did most of the programming and all of the technology, and Nintendo did most of the design. It also did all of the characters," reveals San. Nintendo was responsible for level concepts, but Argonaut was on hand to provide valuable support thanks to its considerable experience in the field of 3D – an area in which Nintendo was still finding its feet, as San recalls: "It was largely Nintendo's staff that designed the stages and levels, but with help from our programmers, who created the scripting system and showed them lots of examples as to what could be done". With Argonaut's talented programmers at their beck and call, Miyamoto and Eguchi were able to break boundaries and create an underpants-soiling experience, the likes of which had never been witnessed before on a home console.



» This section is marginally easier than navigating Nottingham's one-way system

RECEPTION & STARFOX 2

StarFox repaid all of Nintendo and Argonaut's hard work by shifting over four million copies worldwide (although initially the SNES-owning public, raised on a diet of cute 2D titles, were slow to warm to the unusual visuals). Reviews at the time were unanimously positive. The game was marketed as a true next-generation title and was eventually granted 'pack-in' status in the UK – a sure sign that Nintendo regarded it as a 'killer app' that would shift hardware on its own.

With the critical and commercial success of the game, a sequel of some description was inevitable and it seemed that the SNES would be the platform to host it. However, *StarFox 2* was never released, despite being almost complete. Although it was tantalisingly close to release and would have undoubtedly helped the SNES go out with a bang, it seems that the sequel ultimately fell foul of the internal wrangling that was rife within Nintendo at the time, as San reveals: "There was quite a fair amount of politics inside Nintendo with the various departments clashing with each other on major decisions and direction." It was not just *StarFox 2* that was affected either – Argonaut had other exciting projects on the table, all of which suffered the same fate as the highly anticipated sequel.



» Watch the robot bouncers don't ask you for ID

"There are some stubborn characters in the middle management levels of the organisation" San remarks. "Questionable decisions were often made because of someone's 'pet project'. We worked on several secret hardware projects for them. For instance, *The Virtual Boy* was chosen in favour of a far superior product that we had been contracted to design."

STARFOX 64

As the SNES slipped into the mists of time and Nintendo's next machine – the Ultra 64 (later to be rechristened the Nintendo 64) – was announced, a *StarFox* update was on the tip of everyone's tongue (along with many other high-profile Nintendo franchises). When *StarFox 64* was eventually confirmed, Nintendo decided

"QUESTIONABLE DECISIONS WERE OFTEN MADE BECAUSE OF SOMEONE'S 'PET PROJECT'" JEZ SAN

POINTS MEAN PRIZES

To promote the game, Nintendo issued special cartridges to stores. Dubbed *StarFox*: Super Weekend – Official Competition, these carts contained slightly altered levels from the game. The idea was to obtain as many points as possible in the time limit with the top scorers being awarded mind-blowing prizes, ranging from *StarFox*-branded clothing to expensive trips abroad. It is estimated that only 2,000 of these carts were ever produced, and as one might imagine they fetch a pretty penny when they appear on eBay.



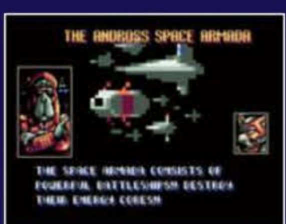
THE MAKING OF… STARFOX



» You can rob wingmen of potential kills, much to their annoyance



» Jeremy 'Jez' San relaxing in the sun, presumably with Nintendo far from his mind



» You're given a quick rundown before each death-defying mission

not to involve Argonaut despite its sterling work on the first game and its (unrewarded) graft on the second.

This didn't surprise San in the slightest: "I think it's typical of some Japanese companies, and particularly of Nintendo. I think they are most keen to work with you when they're still learning new skills and techniques, and that was always their goal. Once we'd taught them how to make three-dimensional games and once we'd produced a huge hit for them, they no longer needed us and were keen to reduce their reliance on us". The split from Nintendo obviously left a sour taste in San's mouth: "They poached some of our key staff and carried on doing those types of games without us. This was far more profitable for them and made them more independent, not relying on a piddly little company in England for their billions of dollars in profit. We dragged them kicking and screaming into the 3D age and we made a nice sum of money for such a tiny company, but it was a fraction of what we could've made if the relationship had continued"

Bitterness aside, San admits that its alliance with one of the biggest and most respected games manufacturers in the world provided undeniable benefits, and many valuable lessons were learnt which would later be incorporated into the Argonaut's best selling 32-bit platform titles such as *Croc* and *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*: "They taught us a lot about how to make mass market games, how to introduce characters, how to worry about control systems more than graphics and how to approach the whole game tuning philosophy".

ARGONAUT TODAY

Argonaut went on to produce other successful games across several different platforms. However, in October 2004 it ran in to financial trouble. Receivers David Rubin & Partners were called in, staff were fired and Argonaut, along with all its satellite studios, was put up for sale.

Thankfully there was a happy ending to this rather sad tale and several companies have since risen from the ashes, thanks in no small part to the efforts of San himself, as he explains: "I financed the management teams of Just Add Monsters and Morpheme to buy back their old companies and continue their good work. So Morpheme became Morpheme Wireless and Just Add Monsters became Ninja Theory. I am involved in both companies, but the management teams of the existing divisions became their own bosses again, just like pre-Argonaut days. Both are doing pretty well". Indeed, Ninja Theory's *Heavenly Sword* is currently one of the most eagerly awaited (and graphically impressive) PlayStation 3 titles.

Not content with throwing a lifeline to many of his former colleagues, San also runs his own company too: "I started PKR (formerly Crunchy Frog) taking some of its best people into the poker business. I've taken videogame technology and the sensibilities of how to make games look good and play well, and combined my two best loves – playing poker in real life and online videogames." As San embarks on another exciting adventure in videogame development, it's hard not to wish him well. He is, after all, the man who taught Nintendo how to fly.

"THEY POACHED SOME OF OUR KEY STAFF AND CARRIED ON DOING THOSE TYPES OF GAMES WITHOUT US" JEZ SAN



» Your weedy lasers don't even dent some of the bigger enemy craft

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



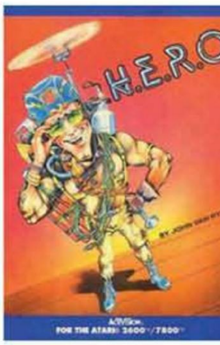
If there's one thing we've learned about retrogaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you actually want it to. Granted a mint copy of Radiant Silvergun is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can picked up for less than a fiver. This month's its John Van Ryzin's wonderful H.E.R.O.. It's cheaper than the latest A-Ha album and sounds a damn sight better.



» Hovering precariously above a crushing lava wall, Rod pondered that he clearly wasn't being paid well enough for this gig

H.E.R.O.

- **SYSTEM:** ATARI 2600/7800
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **DEVELOPER:** JOHN VAN RYZIN



When I was a nipper, five quid was a lot of money—a king's ransom, to be aspired to, only achievable by painstakingly saving up pocket money and earnings from odd jobs. These days, a fiver barely buys you a couple of pints, or two thirds of a movie ticket, yet it's still enough to grab yourself a copy of a magical gem from yesteryear to keep you utterly engaged for far longer than a Guinness or 105 minutes of the most recent Harry Potter flick. The utterly compelling Atari 2600 classic *H.E.R.O.* is one such diamond.

I could tell you that loading *H.E.R.O.* brings nostalgic memories flooding back, the likes of which I haven't felt since first playing the game many years ago, but that would be a flat-out lie. And the reason for this is that the game is one that I've constantly returned to in various forms over the years—Atari 2600, Commodore 64, Colecovision, GBA (via emulation), and now, full circle, back on the Atari 2600 once again.



» Who turned out the lights? Rod makes a mental note not to smash any more hanging lamps

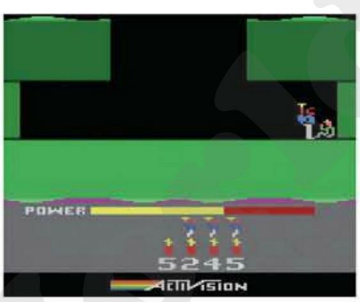
The game's premise is that a volcano has inconsiderately erupted above a mine, causing a number of miners to become trapped. Your job is to guide Rod Hero (R. Hero—geddit?), part of the Helicopter Emergency Rescue Operation, to the trapped miners. Armed with a trusty 'helicopter prop-pack', a few sticks of dynamite (to blast away numerous pesky blocked passageways), and a micro-laser helmet, Rod carefully works his way ever deeper into the mines. Each level finds the paths becoming progressively complex, and increasingly infested with numerous beasties. Huge snakes dart forth from cavern walls, and enormous spiders and moths erratically bound around—just a single touch brings instant death. Although Rod didn't think to bring a giant can of bug killer in addition to the dynamite, his trusty laser helmet makes short work of the nasties, and it also provides another means of destroying the molten lava walls that block various passageways, which otherwise present another way for Rod to instantly kill himself, should everything get a bit too much for him. And when a lone, dispirited miner is finally reached, he shows his appreciation by, erm, raising his arm a bit (well, he's probably very tired and dehydrated), and Rod is instantly transported to the top of the next, more difficult mine.

It's not hard to put my finger on why I find *H.E.R.O.* such a great game. It's not the graphics (which are clean and simple, if unremarkable), and the chunky sound effects aren't anything to shout about either. Where *H.E.R.O.* shone in its day and continues to shine is in its perfectly balanced gameplay. The controls are responsive, yet weighty—the jetpack takes a short while to respond, making the game more of a challenge than it otherwise would be. The rapidly diminishing air supply brings an added dimension to the game, meaning you can't hang around, and features such as fragile lamps that are easily extinguished, small rafts and crushing walls are slowly introduced to maintain interest levels. Even when you think you've mastered the game, it drags you back for 'one more go', perhaps to see how far you can get on a single life, or how quickly you can defeat all its levels.

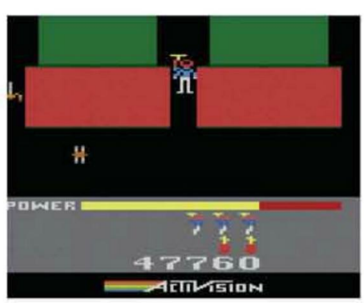
Even in the mid 1980s, this game was good value for money, and at under a fiver today, it's significantly more rewarding and better value than watching an hour and a half of a boy wizard thwarting his mortal enemy once again.



» It was during times like this when Rod wished he could swap places with the surfer from California Games



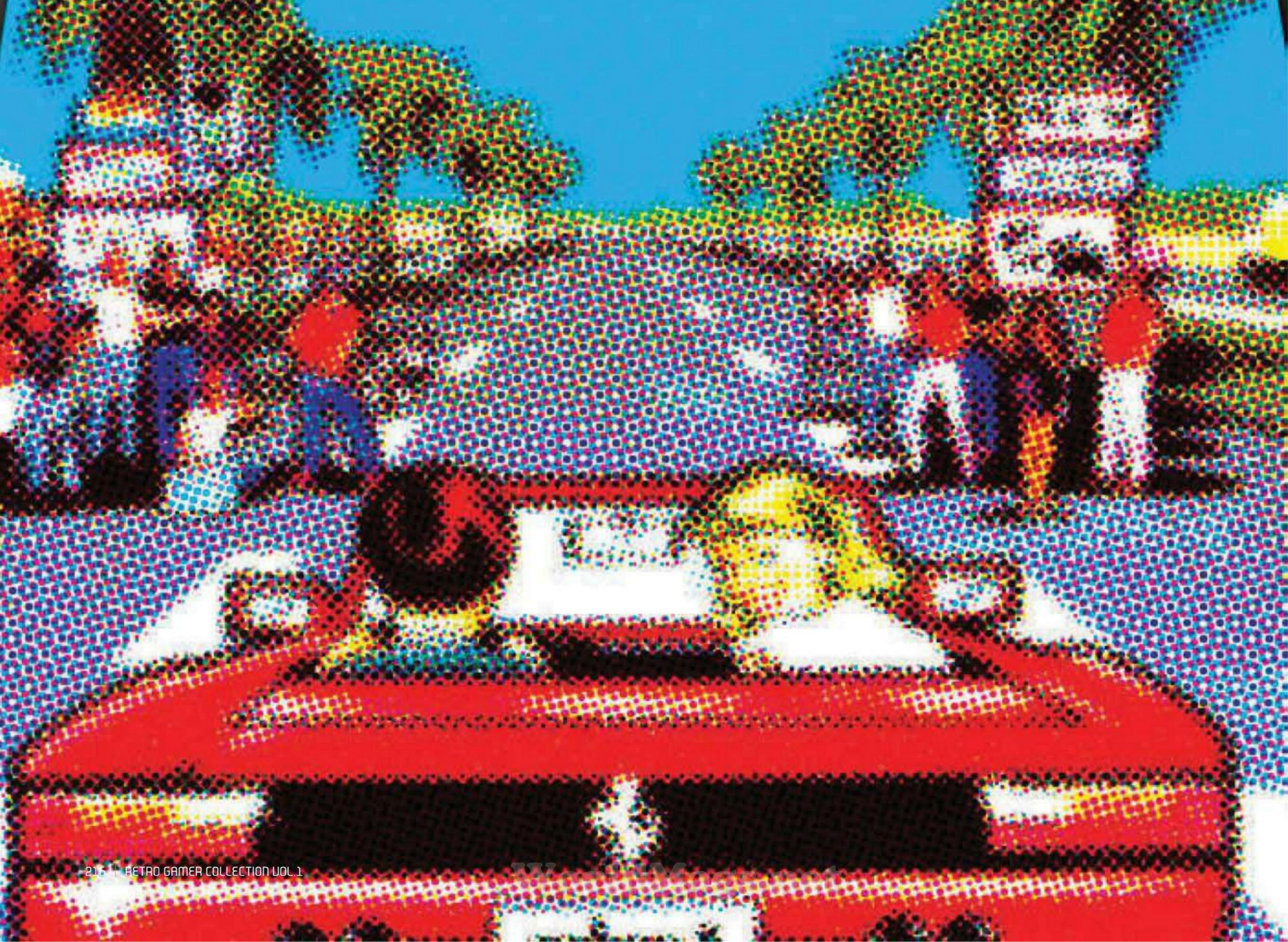
» Having risked life and limb to save him, Rod wasn't impressed when the miner gave him the finger

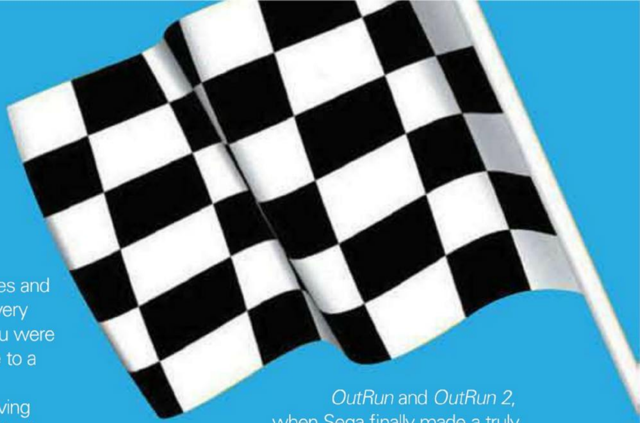


» Rod Hero, having been carelessly flown into a lava wall, stares forlornly out of the screen, asking "Why?"

THE DEFINITIVE OutRun

STUART CAMPBELL GETS SUNBURNT EVERY TIME HE GOES OUT IN HIS REAL SPORTS CAR, SO HE WAS ONLY TOO HAPPY TO TAKE THE WHEEL AND CRUISE FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA THROUGH THE HISTORY OF ONE OF GAMING'S MOST ICONIC FRANCHISES WITHOUT HAVING TO PUT A HAT AND THREE GALLONS OF FACTOR 64 ON FIRST





O*utRun* isn't actually a very good game. It can't be a coincidence that when gamers wax lyrical and nostalgic about it, it's most often the carefree melodies of *Magical Sound Shower,* the nervous energy of *Splash Wave* or the hyperactive orchestral pile-up of *Passing Breeze* that they fondly recall, rather than the thrills of racing the narrow, pernickety Cloudy Mountain or the unforgivingly sudden cliff-lined twists of Devil's Canyon. Or if not the music, then the graphics – the bright sunshine and windsurfers of Coconut Beach and Seaside Town were a revelation to gamers who'd previously had nothing much more to get excited about in racing games than a brief glimpse of a ferris wheel in *Pole Position 2*, and the giant banks of sprites rushing out of the screen certainly gave *OutRun* an air of big-time grandeur compared to its more modestly scaled contemporaries. And finally, the branching routes and varied settings lent a feel of exploration, as if every time you sat in the game's hydraulic cockpit you were actually going somewhere, off on an adventure to a destination as yet undecided.

But the actual driving part is stiff and unforgiving and not much fun. Until *OutRun*, racing games had been about putting the pedal to the metal and dodging whatever appeared in your path in a white-knuckle twitch-fest. Now, just to stay on the road (never mind get past the rest of the traffic), you had to slow down, you had to brake – you had to change gears, for heaven's sake! – and all the boring stuff that you might as well get in a real car for. Going to the arcade was supposed to be about amusement, after all – it said so right over the door.

So despite its massive success, perhaps it's not all that surprising that 17 years passed between *OutRun* and *OutRun 2*, when Sega finally made a truly magnificent game that lived up to the atmosphere, and was even more fun to play than it was to watch someone else playing. They didn't just sit around waiting for inspiration and scratching their backsides in the intervening time, though – *OutRun* evolved into *OutRun 2* through a gruelling and error-strewn adolescence, so join us now on a different kind of beautiful journey, as we find out exactly how you get to there from here. (Although if we were you, we'd have left four hours earlier and started from somewhere else.)

1986
OUTRUN (ARCADE)

Surprisingly few people know that there were two distinct versions of arcade *OutRun* released. The Japanese and 'Over Seas' versions have a different arrangement of courses, and some of the courses themselves are unique to their respective versions. For example, the famous Rock Tunnel stage (aka Gateway) is an entirely different course in the Over Seas version to the Japanese one, as well as appearing much sooner. (Presumably, Sega quickly realised it was one of the more impressive stages and wanted people to see it much earlier when the game was released in the West.) Of the countless home ports at the time, only the Mega Drive version included both options.

The home computer conversions, massively hyped by US Gold for the Christmas 1987 market, were legendarily terrible, though some of them (eg, the Spectrum port) are quite playable now under emulation, with the speed doubled and the absence of the terrible multi-load. The C64 replaces *Passing Breeze* with a 'Radio Off' option, which is endearingly rubbish. The Amiga one is pretty bad, but worth checking out for the splendidly over-the-top bombastic intro, and if you want to experience the ultimate horror track down the MSX version.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Arcade emulator MAME – the 'outrun1' ROM set is the Japan version, and the 'outrun2' set is Over Seas. The latter is also an unlockable in the Xbox port of *OutRun 2*.

1989
OUTRUN 3D (SEGA MASTER SYSTEM)

The Master System had already played host to a pretty dire *OutRun* port, but in 1989 Sega had another go. Designed for the gimmicky 3D-glasses peripheral, but playable in normal-vision mode too, *OR3D* was slightly slower than the first SMS version, but had three difficulty settings, three extra new soundtracks (*Midnight Highway*, *Color Ocean* and *Shining Wind*), and significantly better graphics – the beach was restored to the first stage, and the sluggish Rock Tunnel (whose graphics made crippling demands on all the home gaming platforms of the era) was cleverly replaced by a dark road tunnel instead.

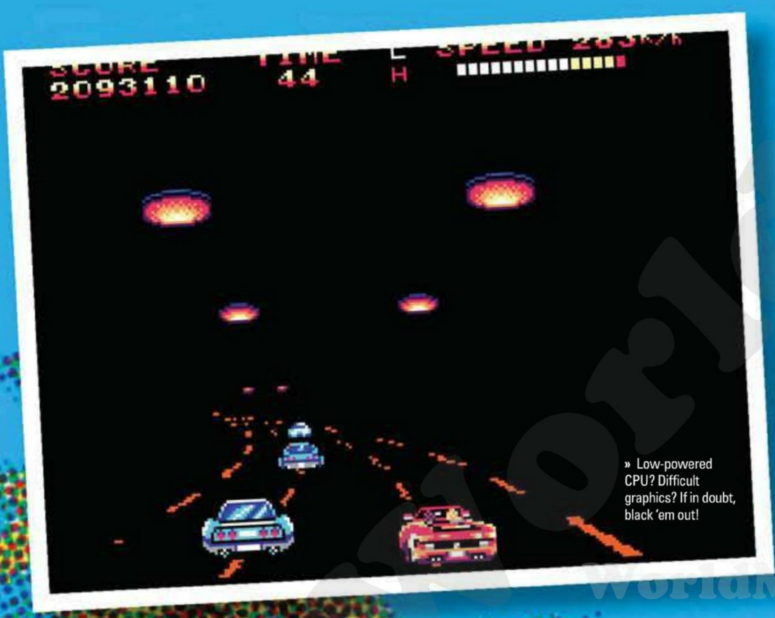


» As you can plainly see, this is the Over Seas version of the iconic Rock Tunnel

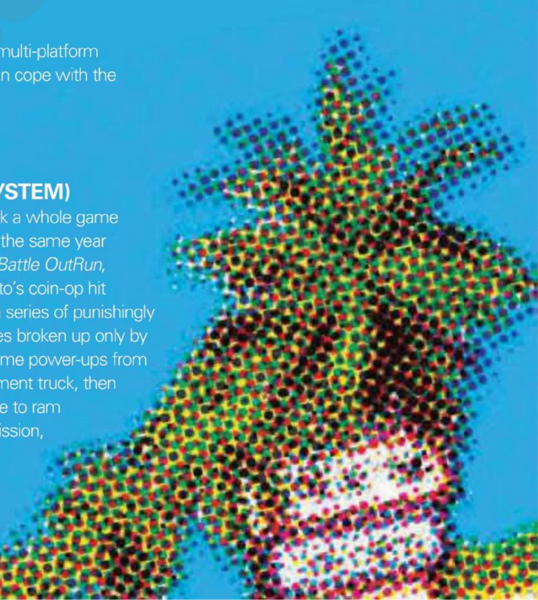
PLAY IT NOW ON: The multi-platform emulator Meka, which can cope with the 3D output.

1989
BATTLE OUT RUN (SEGA MASTER SYSTEM)

It seemed a pity to rework a whole game engine just for *OR3D*, so the same year Sega also came up with *Battle OutRun*, a shameless rip-off of Taito's coin-op hit *Chase H.Q.* Comprising a series of punishingly long and uneventful stages broken up only by the opportunity to buy some power-ups from a *Spy Hunter*-style equipment truck, then an annoyingly brief chance to ram the enemy car into submission,



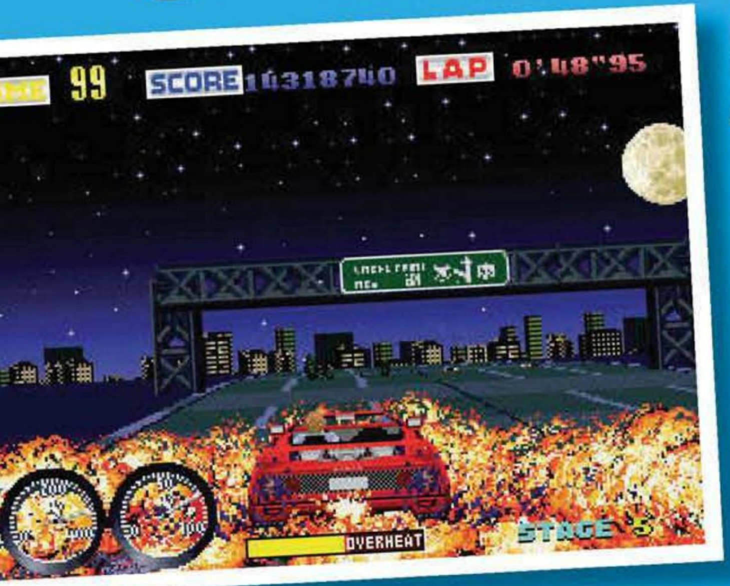
» Low-powered CPU? Difficult graphics? If in doubt, black 'em out!



THE DEFINITIVE OutRun



» You wouldn't think that ramming a big jeep with a delicate Ferrari would be all that smart a tactic



» We would say you'd definitely overheated that turbo a smidgen



Battle OutRun was both boring and nothing really to do with *OutRun*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Meka.

1989
TURBO OUTRUN (ARCADE)

The original *OutRun* was a coin-op smash hit, but after three years its popularity was on the wane. The solution was an 'upgrade kit', easy for operators to slot into the existing cabinets, in the form of *Turbo OutRun*. Despite being chiefly an upgrade (dedicated *TO* cabs are rarer than bowler hats for wasps), *Turbo* is nevertheless a substantially changed sequel. Out go the distinctive branching routes, and in come a raft of new features: weather, night racing, obstacles on the track (including roadblocks, speed bumps, water and wrecked cars), upgrades for your car (three to choose from, one awarded after each set of four stages in the 16-stage trans-USA route), optional automatic gears, a rival who'll pinch your girlfriend if he beats you to the end of a section, annoying police cars and, of course, the turbo boost that gives the game its name. While it's a great game, packed unrelentingly with high-speed action, *Turbo* never achieved anything like the popularity of its parent (perhaps partly because with several urban/darker locations it lacks the mellow, sunny-blue-sky ambience of the original), and nearly all the home ports were dreadful, particularly a barely-recognisable Mega Drive conversion. (The only half-decent attempt was the ugly but playable PC DOS one. The Commodore 64 version is usually well spoken-of, but goodness knows why.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME.

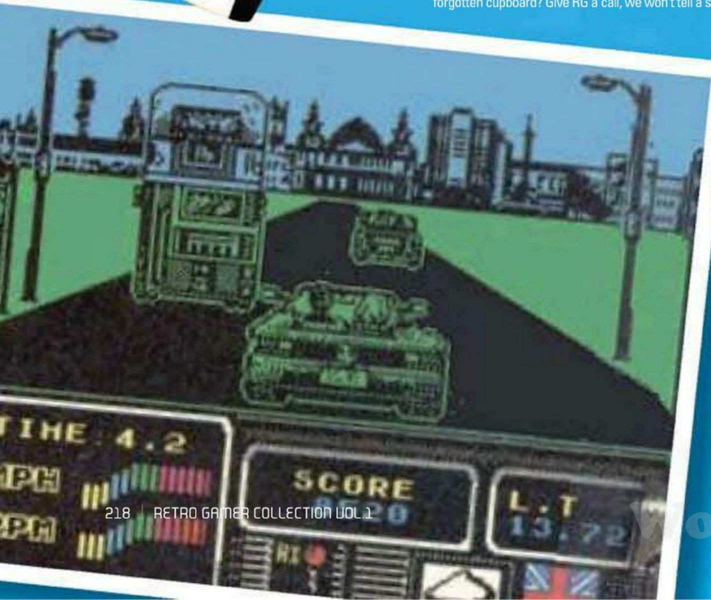
1989
OUTRUN EUROPA (SPECTRUM)

Now, here's a little curio for you. In the May 1989 issue of *Your Sinclair*, the mag ran a two-page preview on a forthcoming third *OutRun* game for home-computer formats, and the first one not to be based on a coin-op. Promising 15 stages divided across five European countries, stacks of new features and almost three times the frame-rate of the original Speccy, *OutRun* despite the impressively large graphics, the preview glows with praise and makes the game sound all but complete (though no actual release date is mentioned).

Allegedly, the game was shelved when publisher US Gold obtained the licence to convert *Turbo OutRun* instead, but it seems bizarre to completely bin such an apparently excellent game (rather than, say, hastily removing any references to *OutRun* and releasing it under a new title) purely in order to undertake another difficult conversion task. (There was also, incidentally, a different-looking C64 version around the same time, originally known as *OutRun Europe*, which looks set to see the light of day soon.) The Speccy version of *Turbo* suffered from most of the same flaws and sluggishness as its predecessor and was a sales flop. But what happened to all that speedy Europa code?

PLAY IT NOW ON: You can't.

» Does someone, somewhere have this locked up in a forgotten cupboard? Give RG a call, we won't tell a soul



THE BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY

OutRun is, of course, famous for being one of the prettiest games of all time. But goodness me, what's this in the family closet?



» MSX version: always put the roof up before getting the car resprayed



» Early Japanese computer the PC-6001. It's doing its best – bless it



» The Spectrum version of *Out Run Europa* was slightly moodier



» "Mega Drive *Out Run* helpline? I seem to be getting a lot of interference"



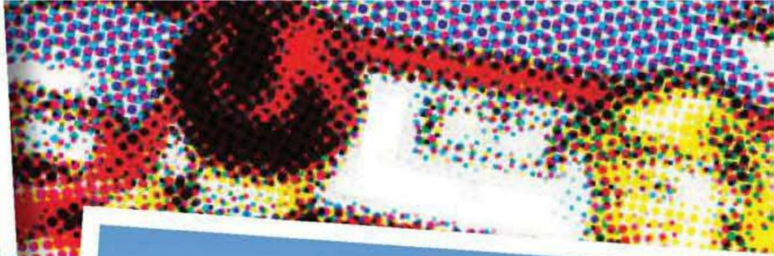
» Rock Tunnel was somewhat neglected by the GBA National Heritage Trust



» Oh, come on, C64 owners – we've all driven down roads like this



» Just out of shot: the QE2, U-571, the royal yacht Britannia and the Titanic



1991
OUTRUN EUROPA (AMIGA/ST/ MASTER SYSTEM/SPECTRUM/ C64 ETC)

After the frenzy of activity in 1989, the next two years were a quiet time for *OutRun*, and it wasn't until the very end of 1991 that the next game in the series actually appeared

It was called *OutRun Europa*, but it bore no resemblance at all to the cancelled Spectrum game – or, for that matter, to any other *OutRun*. An all-original title created by UK developer Probe, *Europa* was a strange cross-continental spy chase, in which the player's traditional red Ferrari was replaced by a variety of vehicles including motorbikes, jetskis and a white Porsche. (The Ferraris, remarkably, weren't to reappear in an *OutRun* game for over a decade.)

The various formats' versions share a theme but are all essentially different games (for example, the Master System/Game Gear title uniquely features *Road Rash*-style punching when on your motorbike and rocket-firing when in your Porsche, and has a front end strongly resembling the C64's earlier, unreleased *OutRun Europa*). All, however, were burdened with an incomprehensible plot, poor visibility, skittish control and frustrating difficulty (especially the 16-bit jetski sections, which took place on the world's most crowded sea lanes), and *Europa* was about as successful as a launderette on a nudist beach.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The Amiga version is narrowly the least rubbish (followed by the Master System), so we'd advice use the excellent WinUAE emulator.

1992
OUTRUN 2019 (MEGA DRIVE)

The fourth and (thus far) final non-arcade-originated title in the *OutRun* lineage is a much-maligned game, and in your reporter's opinion rather unfairly so. It represents a welcome return to several core *OutRun* values, and is a fast, pure racer with lots to see. There are four different courses in the game, each with multiple stages (30 in total, making it twice the size of the original) spread across several branching routes, so it'll take you a fair amount of time just to drive each one. You'll also encounter lots of new features, like jumps, cross-country stretches, bridges, a superfast turbo that kicks in automatically when you reach a certain speed, and even alternative routes within individual stages, including sections where you can race along a raised section of track, landing safely on the lower section if you fall off.

The game suffers from a dark palette, and is a little easy on all but the top difficulty setting, but it's still one of the Mega Drive's top racers, and it can certainly hold its head high at gatherings of the *OutRun* family.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The superb Mega Drive emulator Fusion.

1992
OUTRUNNERS (ARCADE)

If you've ever wondered if there was a missing link between the radically different gameplay styles and handling models of the original *OutRun* and the recent sequels, then wonder no longer – for this was it. *OutRunners* was a twin-cabinet coin-op (you could play it single-player too, but every machine ever built was a two-seater and there was no actual standalone version) in which you can clearly see the roots of *OutRun 2* and *OutRun 2006*.

It's a light-hearted knockabout sort of game, with lots of humour (particularly in the end sequences and the wonderful 'Northern Europe' stage); much driftier cars (you can choose from eight different ones with slightly different characteristics, a first for an *OutRun* game) and the beginnings of *OR2*'s spectacular powerslides are in clear evidence. Several of the picturesque stages (of which there are nominally 30, but most are duplicated on both halves of the map in a different order) are also very reminiscent of ones found in the sequels (the bay bridge, waterfalls, Parisian streets, Mediterranean seaside towns, Easter Island heads and others).

The draw distances are impressive, and there are remixed versions of the classic *OutRun* soundtracks alongside the other tunes on your in-car radio, complete with DJ Jake Elwood (one for *Blues Brothers* fans, there). The cheesy Wurlitzer version of *Passing Breeze* is especially splendid, and suits the joyous, good-time feel of this grin-packed game perfectly. Worth keeping an eye open for.



» The soundtrack, incidentally, contains a tune called *Relight My Fire*

PLAY IT NOW ON: An old version of MAME (0.97 is recommended). More recent versions, in an example of the current MAME development team's obsession with accuracy over usability, will only play the game in twin-monitor mode, wasting more than half of the display area in order to accommodate a useless second screen. If you have plenty of cash and a big living room, you might also like to keep an eye out for the real thing - *OutRunners* was rather over-manufactured and under-sold, so you can easily pick up the arcade twin cabinet in good condition for less than £400.

1993
OUTRUNNERS (MEGA DRIVE)

This one's included as a separate game, because it shares more or less nothing with

» What's a racing game without a few elephants to dodge along the way?



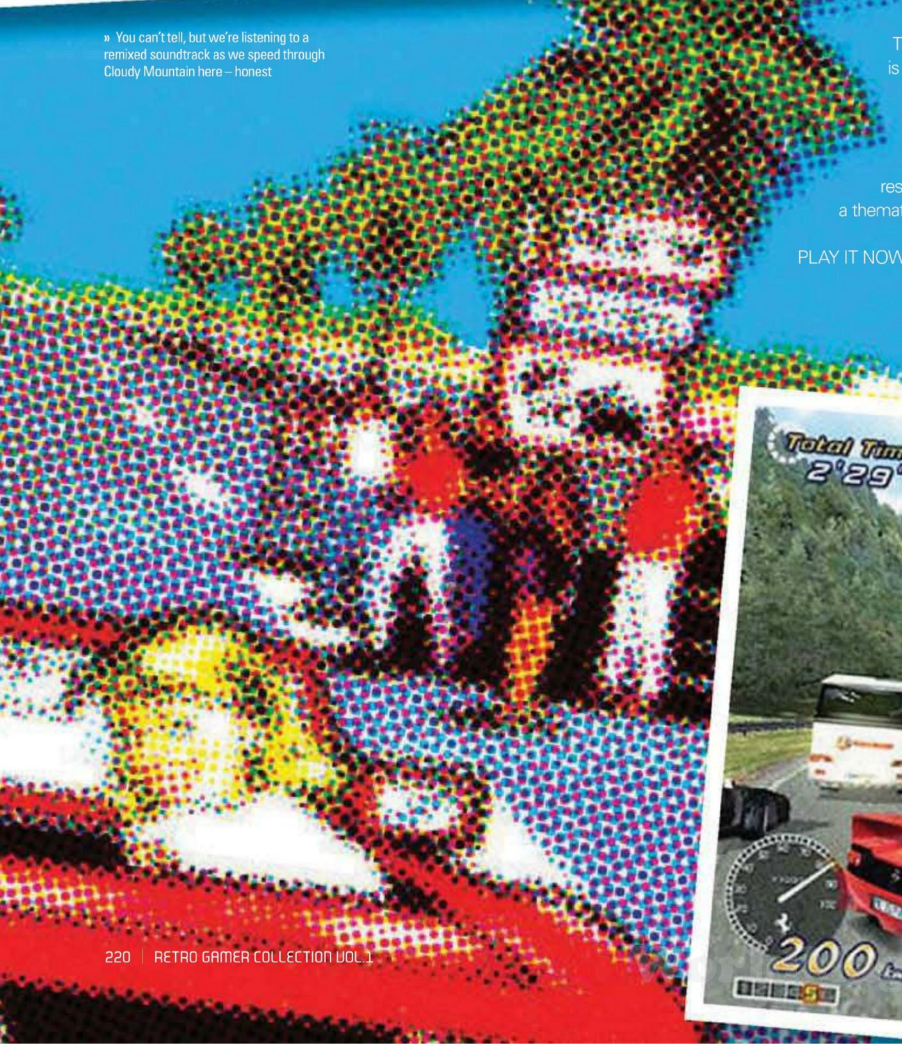
THE DEFINITIVE *OutRun*



» You do get to choose from the same cars as in the arcade, though



» You can't tell, but we're listening to a remixed soundtrack as we speed through Cloudy Mountain here – honest



its coin-op counterpart except the name, and a restrictive two-player target market that means you get a horizontal split-screen even if you're playing in one-player mode. As well as the standard against-the-clock multiple-routes game, there's a baffling 'Original' mode in which you race the CPU on single tracks with no branching. If you beat an opponent you win their car, if you lose you lose the car you were racing in, and you keep going until you've got no cars left to race with. The mode ends, seemingly arbitrarily, after six or seven levels even if you were winning, giving no kind of score or ranking. The MD game in general is extremely primitive both visually and playwise, with near-zero draw distance, terrible collision detection and tracks, which resemble the coin-op's in only a thematic sense.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Fusion.

1996
SEGA AGES OUTRUN (SATURN)

The first arcade-perfect home version of *OutRun*, released for the Japanese Saturn, is mainly notable for (as well as the inclusion of both the Japan and Over Seas modes) its 'Arrange' soundtrack option, which along with the three classic *OutRun* tunes offers substantially remixed new versions of each one, different to any before or since, making it essential for the hardcore *OutRun* completist (although, see Race Oddity). Beware, though, of buying the otherwise high-quality UK release, which bundled the game with two other equally excellent arcade ports (*Space Harrier* and *After Burner*) but hastily had to cut out the remixed tunes to make room on the disc. You can see just how hastily, too – the first time you boot the PAL version up and go to the Options screen, it's possible to select the Arrange version of Magical Sound Shower, but what it actually plays is *Maximum Power*, the *After Burner* title-screen music. (If you select a different tune, the Arrange version disappears from the menu forever.)

PLAY IT NOW ON:
Your imported Japanese Saturn.

» "Are you sure there's nothing about this in the Highway Code?"





» Sega chose oddly grainy textures for the 3D remake of the original – compare this shot of Cloudy Mountain with the one from the Saturn game. Perhaps they didn't want it to steal *OutRun 2*'s "prettiness thunder"

2003
OUTRUN 2 (ARCADE)

Frankly, in this day and age it's amazing that a videogame publisher would let a brand as iconic and loved as *OutRun* lie dormant for a full decade, but evidently someone at Sega finally noticed and they decided to make up for the delay by really pulling out all the stops. *OutRun 2* took everything that was wonderful about the original – the settings, the graphics and the music – and threw away everything that wasn't (the rigid, uptight gameplay), to come up with perhaps the most joyful game ever to see the inside of an arcade.

The defining characteristic of the first *OutRun*'s gameplay was braking and slowing down in order to get round the road's more testing corners. In *OutRun 2*, the method was to go hell-for-leather all the way, and then throw your superpowered car (the Ferraris were back!) into a massive, spectacular, whooping-out-loud powerslide that gave you the ideal opportunity to admire the glorious scenery all the way down the game's incredible draw distances. The playful and inventive Heart Attack mode provided a whole new kind of challenge, the best soundtrack remixes yet were the icing on the cake, and every amusement arcade in the country that could scrape the money together bought one and operates it still.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Xbox. As you might know, the 2004 home conversion made *OutRun 2* even more fantastic, with heaps of new modes and unlockables.

2004
SEGA AGES 2500 VOL 13: OUTRUN (PS2)

If you want to get a handle on this alternative modern updating of *OutRun*, think of it as the game *OutRun* would have been if it had come out in the era of *Daytona USA* and *Sega Rally*. Sega's 'Ages 2500' remakes of its classic coin-op hits (now up to Volume 30 or thereabouts in Japan) have had very mixed receptions and the series is rather obscure as a result, but *OutRun* is one of its most successful releases.

As well as the original game (including both Japan and Over Seas courses) redone with fast, smooth true-3D graphics, you get a whole new *OutRun* in the form of 'Arrange' mode, comprising 14 mostly- new stages through which you tussle with a bunch of rival racers, scoring a million bonus points for each one you beat to the final goal. There's also a Time Trial mode, and more new remixed versions of the classic three or tunes alongside the originals. It's a tad easy at Normal difficulty (and weirdly, the Ferraris have disappeared again), but this is a lovely *OutRun* that no fan should be without, especially at the knockdown price it sells for.

PLAY IT NOW ON: *Sega Classics Collection* for the PS2. Unlike most of the other nine ports on this 50Hz-butchered PAL compilation of Ages titles, *OutRun* gets out more or less intact, with only some small and unobtrusive side borders to put up with.

2006
OUTRUN 2006 COAST 2 COAST (XBOX/PS2/PC/PSP)

We're cheating a little with the chronology here, since frankly you should all be more than familiar with the home versions of *OR2* and *OR2006* without us having to explain them to you. The next game in the timeline was of course *OutRun 2 SP* (which stands, alphabet-defyingly, for *Special Tours*), which hit arcades in early 2005, but since that game's wholly contained within *Coast 2 Coast*, we'll cover it here instead. *OR2006: C2C* is packed with a simply ridiculous amount of *Out Run*.

You get the whole of arcade *OR2*, the whole of *Special Tours*, countless new modes including the opportunity to race all 15 stages of each version in a single continuous race, scores of all-new missions, and truckloads of stuff to unlock by earning 'OutRun Miles'. It's the greatest pure racing game money can buy on each of the four formats it's available on, and, to be honest, if you don't own it by this time tomorrow you need your face kicked off. Which isn't a very nice way to end the feature, so here's a thought about puppies: puppies are cute. See you next time, chums!

RACE ODDITY

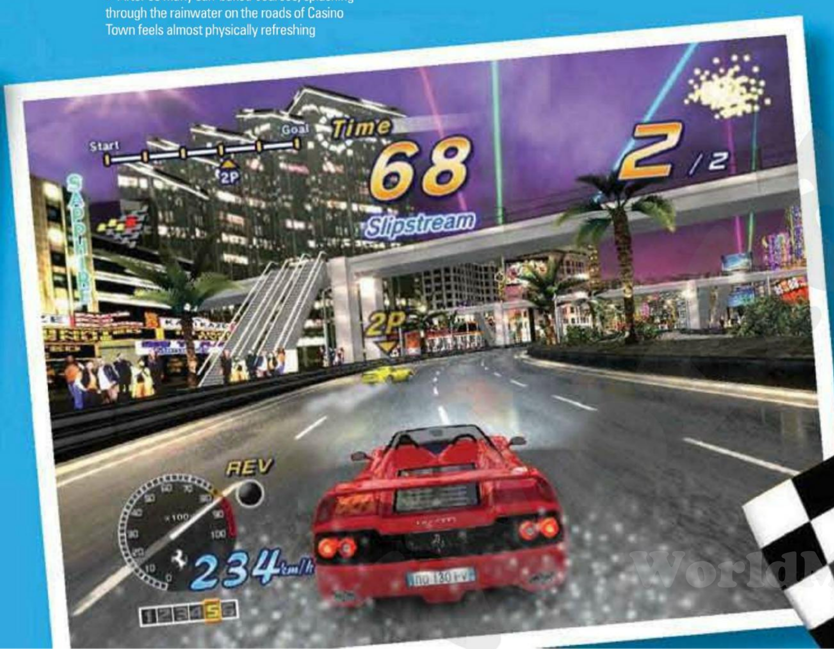
If you're a really, really hardcore *OutRun* collector, you'll also want to own this. *Yu Suzuki Game Works Vol. 1* was a Japanese-only release for the Dreamcast, compiling the early coin-op history of the legendary designer. It featured arcade-perfect ports of *After Burner, Hang-On* (albeit one with *Shenmue* billboards sneaked in), *Power Drift* and *Space Harrier,* alongside a slightly arcade-imperfect version of *OutRun.* Due to some arcane licensing issues, your car isn't the classic *OutRun* Testarossa, but a different and generic-looking red sports car without the famous Ferrari prancing-horse logo on the back. Oddly for a game released exclusively in Japan, you get only the Over Seas model, and there are no new or remixed tunes either.

If you care enough to own this *OutRun* because it's got a slightly different car you probably have too much money, but if you at least want to pick it up cheaper than the very rare DC import, the Game Works version of *OutRun* is also the one which shows up in both the Dreamcast and Xbox versions of *Shenmue 2.* (Although slightly curiously, the Ferrari does return in the version of original *OutRun* that's unlockable in *OutRun 2* on the Xbox.) Seriously, though – get out more.



» Above shots: the original arcade car; Below: the Game Works version

» After so many sun-baked courses, splashing through the rainwater on the roads of Casino Town feels almost physically refreshing





THE MAKING OF...

GHOSTBUSTERS

Ghostbusters was something of a revolution when it hit the Commodore 64. Many movie titles beforehand were tedious, cynical cash-ins that often shared little or no resemblance to the actual movie they were based on. David Crane's Ghostbusters was different and proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that busting really did make you feel good



When you look back at the god-awful film and TV licences that came out on the early 8-bit computers, it's shocking to realise that many of them actually appeared after David Crane's delightful *Ghostbusters* and not before. Turds such as *Street Hawk*, *Knight Rider*, *Highlander* and *Miami Vice* – interestingly, all by Ocean – were just a few of the titles to make gamers curse with frustration; mainly because they shared little, or nothing in common with what they were actually supposed to be based on. Earlier systems such as the Atari 2600 fared little better, and while the odd enjoyable gem springs to mind on that system (*The Empire Strikes Back* being a reasonable example) it was hamstrung by some atrocious pieces of coding, the most memorable being Atari's infamous *ET: The Extra Terrestrial*.

"To be fair, the biggest problem with Atari's *ET* was the sheer cost of the licence," explains Crane when we ask him why so many licences failed to make the grade. "Atari had to sell around four million copies of the game just to break even. That would have been more games than any cartridge in history. Then you have the fact that the game itself was developed in record time – leaving the game designer very little time to ensure the game played well." So while *ET* is a more extreme example of a poor licence, it does highlight one crucial aspect that all licences do have in common – a ridiculously short development cycle. "You have to remember that there is usually no interest in an actual movie licence, until the movie itself is far enough along to generate some actual excitement," continues Crane. "And once a movie is finally released its excitement only lasts so long, so a videogame publisher has to identify a licence, negotiate a licence, design and program a game, then get cartridges manufactured and on the shelves before the movie is old news. When all of these tasks have to fit into a compressed schedule, it is the amount of time allocated to game design and programming that inevitably suffers."

When you have a schedule as tight as the above, it helps that all parts of your team are firing on all cylinders, and being able to spot a potential hit ahead of time is crucial for success. Step forward one Tom Lopez, then vice president of Activison's Product Development who Crane gives full credit to



» Yet another slimer gets trapped – the *Ghostbusters* are in business

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **DEVELOPER:** DAVID CRANE/ ACTIVISION
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PITFALL!
SYSTEMS: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1985

A BOY AND HIS BLOB
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1989



GHOSTBUSTERS

BETTER LATE THEN NEVER

With *Ghostbusters* being a huge hit on the Commodore 64 it was somewhat inevitable that it would begin to appear on many other systems. What's interesting though is the amount of time that passed before some of them were released. While versions for the Amstrad, Spectrum 48k (the 128k version had a superior soundtrack), MSX and Atari 2600 all appeared in 1985, the NES, Master System and Mega Drive titles didn't appear until a few years later. The Master System was first off the blocks with a rather solid update in 1987, the so-so NES version appearing a year later, and finally, the Mega Drive received its own version in 1990, six years after the original game was released, which was actually a rather cool little platformer with great replicas of the film's stars. With such a gap in systems, it's perhaps unsurprising to learn that Crane had very little to do with the later versions. "By the time a game is being ported to other platforms, the designer of the original game has long since moved on to another original project. This is exactly what happened with *Ghostbusters*."





» Before you started busting you had to equip your car with the right equipment



for acquiring the lucrative licence before any other publisher expected it to be a hit. "When choosing movie licences for videogames you have to catch a licence early if you have any hope of making a good deal financially," Crane continues, clearly warming to the subject. "A good example is that of Acclaim when it signed the rights for *The Simpsons* when it was still a small feature on the Tracy Ulmann show."

Nowadays film licences can be a tricky proposition with anything from the film studio to the actual movie's stars calling the shots on how the game is finally realised. Fortunately for Crane, things were not quite so hands-on back in 1984 and the talented programmer found himself with a surprising amount on freedom, for what was to be such a big licence. There were no requests from Columbia to make a specific type of game, there were no rules or stipulations in place that meant Crane's already short development time would be further decreased, he was simply allowed to get on with it. A deal that suited Crane perfectly. "I had a script and some storyboards, and that was enough," he confirms. "My personal opinion on how to design a licensed game is this: Design an original game that works within the THEME of the actual licence. Don't try to make the movie into a game… make a game that borrows from the look and feel of the movie." Of course, when you already have some game mechanics in place, it makes it a lot easier to work out a final product, particularly when you find that its development time is going to be severely cut down.

"When Tom Lopez determined that the *Ghostbusters* licence was available and that he could get it for a reasonable price, he came to the game design group," continues Crane. "He told us, 'this licence is available. To make financial sense we will have to make a game in six weeks (as opposed to the normal nine months). What can we do?' We all agreed that if we had to start a game from scratch we could not do a quality game in the necessary timeframe." Luckily for Lopez, Crane had already been toying with a game called *Car Wars* that featured a resource-allocation segment where players could buy different armaments for their cars from the money they had earned on levels. *Car Wars* was also due to feature a top-view racing segment that would combine both racing and shooting. Needless to say, the seeds of an idea were quickly formulating in Crane's mind.

"One of the coolest props from the movie was the hearse-turned-ghostmobile," laughs Crane, clearly enjoying the trip down memory lane. "I could picture how to wrap the theme of this new movie around my existing game, with the minimum amount of effort. I kept the top-view racing game and replaced the guns, missiles, and rocket launchers with more appropriate 'weapons' such as the Ghost Vacuum. Ultimately, though, if the base game *Car Wars* hadn't contained a resource-allocation segment, there is no way that the *Ghostbusters* game would have featured it. That's great, because I like the way it works. But the harsh realities of development schedules have a major impact on game features. It always has and it always will."

Obviously, Crane is being rather generous in how easily *Ghostbusters* came together. While the structure was in place, and many of the game mechanics had been decided, what lay ahead was six weeks of incredibly hard graft that saw Crane and the rest of the team working around the clock in order to meet their stringent deadline. "Obviously, *Ghostbusters* could have been a much better game with more development time," concedes Crane. "But if it missed the window of opportunity it would not have been the commercial success that it became. And Crane's tip for looking out for a commercial success? "Look for the sequels," he laughs. "No unsuccessful game has ever been followed by a sequel."

Keen to learn how Crane would have improved on an already enjoyable game our eagerness had to wait as Crane was now in full flow… "Here's a tip for game designers I like to call: 'How to deal with a tight deadline.' Complete a full game as quickly as possible, and then go back and enhance until they pry the code from your hands. After that, STOP adding features and only fix bugs, or you'll simply fall victim to 'creeping elegance'. Give your game a beginning, middle, and an end. If the code-release deadline comes and all you have is a fully playable and beautifully tweaked main game, all of your work is

> "IT WAS ALWAYS A CHALLENGE MAKING THINGS LOOK RECOGNISABLE ON THE 8-BIT CONSOLES"
> DAVID CRANE





» As you drove to your next location it was possible to suck up stray ghosts

commercially worthless! That game can't be released.

Implement the complete game flow, from the time the player boots up until the final congratulations screen. Do this first, even if the fun part – the main gameplay sequence – is nothing but a placeholder. Second, make the game really fun but leave out neat little enhancements that might take a day or two to code. Then in the last weeks of a project, revisit each part of the sequence based on greatest need and add the cool little ideas that have been percolating in your brain.

The result is that near the end of the allocated time you have an average, but complete game that has at least some commercial value even before it has all the coolest tweaks. But since everybody knows that a great game sells better than an average game, you have the leverage to show your publisher that you can improve the game with each subsequent day they can give you.

I did this with the *Ghostbusters* title (as I do with all my games). I spent every hour that the schedule allowed tweaking the game, and it came out okay in the end. I could have done a lot more, but in the final analysis it seems to have been enough."

It certainly did seem to be enough, as *Ghostbusters* proved to be a massive hit for both Activision and Columbia, but was Crane concerned that such an effects-laden movie would translate well to an 8-bit home computer? "Not at all," he tells us. "If you think about it, it wasn't the special effects that made the movie enjoyable, nor would special effects make the game more playable. Modern console games often fall into the trap of substituting effects for gameplay. It was much easier for us in the Eighties to avoid that trap because the hardware was so much more limiting than what is on the market today. You set out to design a fun game, and you put in as many cool effects as you could without compromising the fun."

One notable aspect of Crane's *Ghostbusters*, was that, unlike many of his previous titles, it was released on the C64 first and then ported over to the Atari 2600, which by then Crane declares as "being history". Despite Crane's frank statement, he still holds a torch for Atari's popular console. "The Atari 2600 was the most challenging system to program in history, and I loved it," he tells us. "As a puzzle-solver I derived great satisfaction from making the 2600 do things that its designers had never intended. The Commodore 64 on the other hand was far simpler. On one hand that allowed me to spend more time on gameplay and less on display difficulties. But in missing the challenge I would often try to make the Commodore 64 do unusual things. Why else would my first C64 game be able to talk?"

Ah yes, *Ghostbusters*' now infamous speech. While not the first game to offer digitised speech – that honour goes to Williams' *Sinistar* – it was certainly a chatty

GHOSTBUSTERS



» As the PK energy built up in the city the ghosts became more and more numerous

WHO YOU GONNA CALL? THE OLIVER BROTHERS…

With David Crane unavailable for *Ghostbusters II*, Activision needed somebody else to create a follow-hit for the 1989 sequel. Several talented developers worked on various versions of the game with the Oliver Twins taking care of the Spectrum and Amstrad conversions. The actual game featured a variety of different playing styles, and whilst the graphics and sound were far superior, it didn't quite have the charm of the original game. "I prefer to break new ground with my game designs," replies Crane when we question him about why he wasn't involved with the sequel. "In the rare case of a sequel, such as *Pitfall II*, I was trying to accomplish things never before seen in a game. So if I work on a sequel it is more a matter of working an original game that happens to share a theme with another game."





» There was a fair amount of flickering, but the Amstrad conversion was pretty good



little title. "Midway through development, I decided it was important to add digitised speech to the game," explains Crane. "Some of the trendiest things to come from the movie were sound bytes such as 'He slimed me' and the crowd chanting 'Ghostbusters!' I felt the sounds helped to capture the spirit of the movie (pun intended) so I decided to keep them in."

Of course, you can't mention *Ghostbusters*' impressive sound without giving its fantastic rendition of the theme tune a mention. "*Ghostbusters* music was a masterful job of orchestration using the limited (by today's standards) music capability of the Commdore 64," insists Crane. "Russell Lieblich created a theme song so true to the original that if Columbia had any concerns about its authenticity they were never voiced to me. In fact, once I heard Russell's excellent rendition I just HAD to feature it as the lead-in to the game."

Not only did Ray Parker Junior's hit play at the beginning of the game, it was also accompanied by the actual words, so fans could sing along to their hearts' content. A nice touch that's rarely seen in today's blockbusters. "That was a great example of collaboration," explains Crane when we ask him how it originated. "The music was perfect – so much so that I felt it deserved to be featured. I pictured the sing-along screen – including the digitised crowd chanting "Ghostbusters!" But I didn't have the time to write the code. I passed it over to Garry Kitchen and his game design crew with the request to make a follow-the-bouncing-ball sequence to go along with the music. They did a great job on the implementation, and I was able to add it into the game at the very last minute. A reviewer of the day had this to say about the game – referring, I believe, to that particular feature – 'never before have I so thoroughly enjoyed playing or even watching a game as entertaining as this one.'"

While creating the sound was relatively straightforward, creating the game's adversaries wasn't quite as simple. "It was always a challenge making things look recognisable on the 8-bit consoles," admits Crane. "There were actually times where a game design had to change because the on-screen objects that I wanted couldn't actually be drawn. I finally reached the point where I would tell the artists that I'd need some animals, some insects, and treasures. I left it up to them to draw a bunch of things and I picked the ones that looked the best. The ghosts were just as difficult, if not more so. The character artist on the project, Hillary Mills, did a lot of experimenting to make the ghosts look like ghosts. There's a little bit of Casper's cousins as well as influences from the movie in the final art. And, of course, there was the whole transparency issue. But overall I liked all the ghosts that we finally settled upon."

With the graphics and sound in place, it's time to return to what made *Ghostbusters* so fun in the first place: its varied gameplay. Crane's hit has a masterful blend of different play mechanics ranging from simple resource management, to driving, to action. How did he manage to get the balance just right? "One way to achieve deeper gameplay is to intersperse multiple levels requiring differing player skills," Crane tells us. "Otherwise you run the risk of boring the gameplayer. One thing to remember is that during the development of a game, the designer plays portions of the game thousands of times over. If we can make a game that is not boring to ourselves, it might just stand the test of time with consumers as well. So mixing different styles of play is good on many different levels. Masterful? Maybe. But good game design philosophy? Definitely." This was no more apparent than when you headed off to capture each new ghost. Rather than simply arrive at your next location, trap in hand, you drove to it (and in a nice touch, could suck up nearby ghosts if your car had the relevant equipment). "One of the hardest things to do in a game design is to segue between levels or tasks. You want to create a transition that makes sense and keeps the player immersed in whatever fantasy you have created for him. So ironically, the driving sequence fits perfectly between the game's ghost-catching levels. It also tied into the story line and gave the game the appearance of conforming to a sequence of events – something we have come to expect from movies."

Considering how solid the finished game was, it's surprising to discover that there were plenty of elements that Crane would have liked to fix if he had received extra development time. The sections that saw you capturing Slimers was to have different

"LOOK FOR THE SEQUELS; NO UNSUCCESSFUL GAME HAS EVER BEEN FOLLOWED BY A SEQUEL"
DAVID CRANE

ghosts and tasks; Crane had also envisioned there to be much more going on around the city map and wanted to add many more different accessories to your car.

Ultimately though, everything turned out just fine, but was there anything in the final game that Crane wasn't happy about? "I always wanted to change the victory screen," he admits. "Every game has to have one, and in a perfect world it should be something spectacular. After all, the player has just completed a game that can take hours; he should be rewarded for it. But in the grand scheme of resource allocation, considering schedule, artist's time, programmer's time, and memory (ROM, RAM, disk space), a scene viewed only once per game is really not that important.

In *Ghostbusters*, at the end of the game you cross the streams (which is supposed to potentially bring about the end of the universe), and what you get is the door to the other dimension closing. Game Over… Big Deal. I expect players to be disappointed with it. Sadly, to really beef up that one sequence would have taken memory and artist's time away from the main game. It would have effectively diminished the game. As a game designer I make decisions on those tradeoffs dozens, if not hundreds of times for every game I design."

So there you have it, a licensed game, made in just six weeks that was actually pretty damn good (unlike many other licences we've had to endure over the years). Even today, *Ghostbusters* remains an enjoyable (if aged) title to play and before Crane left we wanted to know why he felt the game has endured over the years.

"Nostalgia is a powerful force. The movie was a blockbuster, and it was just so funny that you can't help but like anything that was associated with it. The game was a good one, although certainly not my best work ever. And for most of us, the time in our lives when we played *Ghostbusters* for the first time was a simpler time with mostly fond memories."



» If too many of your Ghostbusters were slimed simply head back to HQ and recruit some more

FLASHBACK



- » **FILM:** GHOSTBUSTERS
- » **YEAR RELEASED:** 1984
- » **DIRECTED BY:** IVAN REITMAN
- » **STARRING:** BILL MURRAY, DAN AYKROYD, HAROLD RAMIS, SIGOURNEY WEAVER
- » **WATCH IT NOW ON:** DVD

When Ivan Reitman saw Dan Aykroyd's original draft for *Ghostbusters*, set in a near future where competing, interplanetary ghosts and monster-catching firms compete for business, he could see the massive potential for comedy posed by the underlying premise of the script. He suggested setting the film in contemporary New York around a university, while maintaining the essential comedic principle of three naive experts attempting to go into business for themselves. Harold Ramis was brought in as a writer (then later cast as Spengler), and the three of them refashioned the concept into the film we now know and love.

The cast and crew have always maintained they knew the movie was going to be big. When working on a script of such imaginative quality, populated by some of the finest comedians and film makers available, there's no point pretending the result would be anything less than incredible. *Ghostbusters* had it all: big money special effects, action, originality and, most importantly, laughs.

Very few films have ever succeeded in transcending genre the way this film did, creating an immediate cult icon involving every aspect of its production from prop and costume, through character design to the funkadelic soundtrack. Overnight, *Ghostbusters* became an essential part of 20th Century heritage.





THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

Join Darran Jones as he dons a stealth suit, grabs a handful of throwing stars and replays one of the Mega Drive's greatest platformers of all time



» Musashi's new magical skills allowed him to do anything from creating a powerful force field to summoning huge dragons



» One of the few levels that retains the two-tiered level structure of the original game

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **VERSION FEATURED:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989 (1990 UK)
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER/ACTION
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+

Life was good for UK gamers when the Mega Drive appeared at the latter end of 1990. Thanks to being released a year after the Genesis and two years after the Japanese machine debuted there was a decent line-up of launch games to choose from. Sure, dross like *Italia World Cup 90* and the pack-in horror that was *Altered Beast* spoilt things a little, but there were still plenty of classy titles. One such gem being the rather excellent *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, Sega's superb follow-up to its 1987 arcade hit *Shinobi*.

Sega's original coin-op was a fast-paced actioner in the vein of Namco's *Rolling Thunder* that required you to race through each stage as ninja master Joe Musashi and rescue a set number of kidnapped children. Musashi dutifully returned for the impressive sequel, and the end result was a blinding mish-mash of platforming and action that featured stunning looking visuals, a thumpingly good soundtrack and plenty of new gameplay enhancements. There were no children to rescue this time around; you just had to make your way through 24 challenging stages and defeat the head of evil crime syndicate Neo Zeed. Easy, right? Think again.

While *Shinobi* raced along like an ostrich on roller skates, the pace of *Revenge* was more sedate, with Musashi – now sporting a fetching white outfit – nonchalantly strolling through each level with all the urgency of an 80-year old pensioner taking a trip to the post office. Sure, there were still plenty of enemies to do battle against – the first stage alone threw samurai warriors, vicious dogs and numerous ninjas at you – but now it was possible to take in the sumptuously designed levels that Sega had created while you leisurely kicked ninja ass.

Although *Revenge*'s speed took a little while to become accustomed to, Sega's decision to use an energy bar instead of the 'one hit and you're dead' approach of *Shinobi*, was a stroke of genius and proved particularly useful when you were battling against *Revenge*'s often-spectacular bosses. Other notable improvements/amendments to the core



» This memorable boss is a huge truck carrying a guided missile. You need to destroy several key points in order to stop it

gameplay included being able to start off with a set number of shuriken (although there was a handy 'infinity' cheat for the less skilled) getting to choose between four distinct types of magic and a handy double jump to clear those tricky gaps. Wooden crates were also judiciously littered throughout each stage and once opened, would supply the ninja master with extra shurikens, health and magic. It

"WHILE SHINOBI RACED ALONG LIKE AN OSTRICH ON ROLLER SKATES, THE PACE OF REVENGE OF SHINOBI WAS FAR MORE SEDATE"



was also possible to gain a power-up that would enhance your throwing stars and provide you with a deadly sword – at least until you received damage from an enemy. Care must be taking when opening crates though, as certain boxes contained bombs that would rob you of your health.

Thanks to its many enhancements, *Revenge* was a huge leap over the original *Shinobi*, both technically and artistically. The popular two-tiered levels of the original game may have been confined to a few select stages, but they were arguably superior to any of the efforts seen in the 1987 coin-op. One level set on a bustling bridge had you leaping in and out of the foreground, as you frantically avoided killer nuns, on-coming sports cars and breaks in the bridge itself, while another stage had you invading a heavily protected military base, which required you to constantly leap over both sides of a giant fence as you dealt with gun-toting soldiers, dangerous Alsatians and flamethrower-wielding Rambo look-alikes. If the level design was an improvement on *Shinobi*, the actual aesthetics were a revelation, with the slick Mega Drive title being a million miles away from the rather functionary look that had served its predecessor so well two years previously. Thanks to the Mega Drive's extra graphical grunt and the imagination of Sega's in-house team, the many locations that Musashi journeyed through boasted a staggering amount of variety and were crammed with startling detail. One level saw the stealthy one making his way through a mystical-looking Japanese forest, while a later stage had him racing across the top of a speeding train. Other visual treats included huge, cascading waterfalls, moonlit walks across skyscraper skylines and – in one of *Revenge*'s only frustrating moments – a frantic dash through a seemingly impenetrable labyrinth that's absolutely swarming with enemies.



» Sod off Rambo; you had your own Mega Drive game!

If *Revenge*'s levels created a canvas of startling beauty, then Yuzo Koshiro's scintillating tunes were surely the finishing strokes of Sega's masterpiece. While inferior to his later *Streets Of Rage* compositions – deemed by many as some of Koshiro's best work – a quick listen to the likes of *Terrible Beat* and *Over The Bay* give a subtle hint of the musical greatness that was to come. *Terrible Beat* in particular, which accompanies every intense boss fight, is a superb tune – all rolling drums and electrifying synths – and perfectly captures the terror of going up against *Revenge*'s many deadly bosses.



» If you had plenty of spare lives, hari kari was a great way of destroying *Revenge*'s more troublesome foes

Ah yes, those marvellous mayors of destruction. From the moment you encounter the huge katana-wielding samurai at the end of level one, to the final showdown with Zeed himself, *Revenge*'s bosses never fail to impress in both their meticulous design and ingenious attack patterns. Granted, the stiff animation (particularly on Godzilla) tends to give away their age somewhat, but the bosses still manage to enthuse you with the same sense of wonderment you had when you first encountered them. And that's the beauty of *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. Even 18 years after its initial release, *Revenge* still manages to impress, delight and entertain in equal measures and remains one of the Mega Drive's most enjoyable games. High praise indeed.

COMIC CAPERS

Start making decent headway into *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s later levels and it becomes obvious that Sega's developers were influenced by various comic books of the time. Both Spider-Man and Batman appear as bosses at the end of stage six, while a Godzilla look-alike can be found at the end of the seventh level's missile factory. Sega made a number of revisions to the code – no doubt to avoid potential lawsuits – and subsequently changed Batman and Godzilla. Batman turned into a flying demon while Godzilla changed into a skeletal monstrosity complete with bleach white bones and showing organs. One final nod should go to the weird Terminator/Hulk hybrid that can be found in the junkyard at the end of level four. Obviously modelled on Arnold Schwarzenegger, he turns increasingly greener, before eventually revealing his metallic insides and subsequently exploding.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

E-SWAT: CYBER POLICE
SYSTEMS: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1990

SPACE HARRIER II
SYSTEMS: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1988

STRIDER
SYSTEMS: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1990



CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learned about retrogaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you actually want it to. Granted a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can picked up for less than a fiver, like Sunsoft's *Batman*. It costs less than a 'Catwoman dance' at a gentleman's club, but lasts far longer.

BATMAN

- » **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHER:** SUNSOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



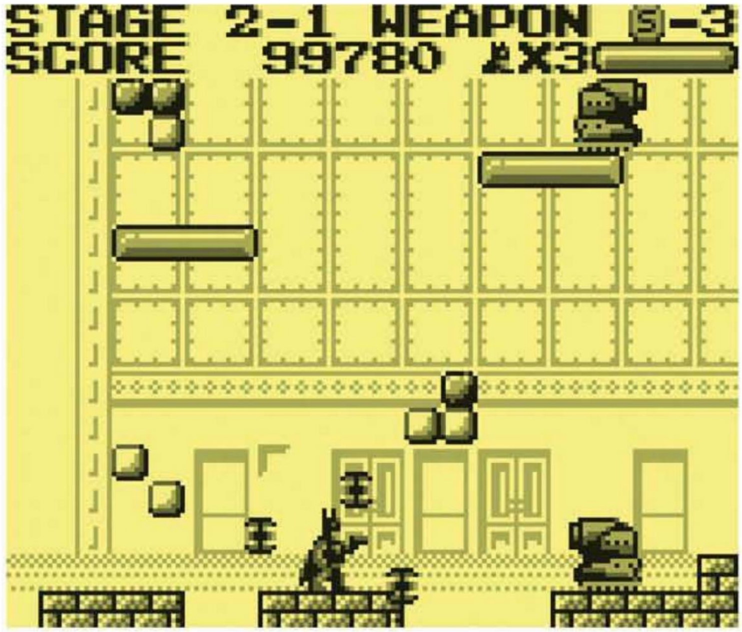
There's something wonderful about the earlier games for Nintendo's Game Boy, when developers were still becoming accustomed to the machine's limitations in colour and screen resolution. When playing most of these earlier titles it's clear developers were holding themselves back, perhaps believing that large sprites or fast scrolling gameplay would render games impossible on the pea-green portable. As a result, many fitted snugly on the screen with tightly balanced gameplay to match – they were arguably better than later games which tried to be bigger and faster (like the mess that was *Donkey Kong Land*), because they understood their limitations and hence worked so much better within them.

Batman by SunSoft is one such early example of miniaturised monochrome perfection. It has a lot in common with the original *Super Mario Land* on the GB (not just the fact that both can be found today for pennies); both contain the same super-distilled shrunk-down style and pacing. The main Batman character is only 16-pixels high (a bit more if you count his ears), while his enemies are of similar stature. Despite this there is much personality in the tiny beings, with the main protagonist being instantly recognisable as the caped crusader of Gotham City. Even though the visuals are smaller than later GB games, the game manages to pull of a few impressive visual tricks, including one where the entire screen twists vertically (noticeable on the title screen and when a level starts).

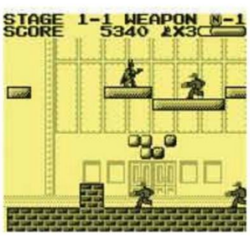
The gameworld is comprised of *Mario*-style blocks which can destroyed (using Batman's gun), and in some cases also contain valuable power-ups. Jumping physics are smooth with just the right level of floatiness, and with the small characters means you never have to make blind leaps of faith because the screen isn't showing the next platform. It all combines to make a game perfectly suited to the handheld – the platforming is effortless and innately fun, while the need to destroy blocks crudely borrows some of Mario's charm and reworks into a new structure. Batman can also walk while ducking, which leads to a desire for exploration and finding secrets. Scattered throughout the levels are various power-ups to collect: different weapons like wave guns and batarangs, extra ammunition to fire more than one bullet at a time, spinning bat shields, extra health and, of course, core boosters.

To break things there's even some shoot-'em-up levels, where Batman takes to his vehicle [Robin, to the Batmobile! Dunununununununun BATMAAAN! – Ed], which suddenly gains rockets and is able to fly. This has the same subdued style as the other levels and proves great fun, but is a wonderful surprise to find. After this there's further levels, including a rather tricky one that auto-scrolls, and suddenly you're fighting The Joker for the second time. Then the game has been won and is sadly over, leaving you a broken empty shell of your former self as you realise there is nothing new to discover. Dejected, you move to a small fishing village in the outer Hebrides, mending nets while waiting for your final days, forever thinking of the past and the time you nearly started a new religion based around SunSoft's handheld *Batman* title – Batmanism.

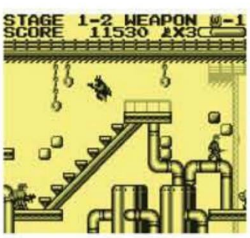
It may have been a film licence, and far removed from the other early *Batman* games, but it can still provide hours of fun. When you consider the likelihood of finding it for under £1 at a carboot sale, lying in a pile of other people's games and general junk (just beware of people trying to sell trashbags filled with ducklings), *Batman* is something to keep an eye out for.



» Notice the spinning bat-shaped shields that encircle Batman, protecting him from damage



» The sprites may be small, but the game was well balanced and made perfect use of the screen real-estate



» There's a kind of minimalist ornate beauty to early GB games



» The battarang (three of which can be seen above Batman's head) is the most useful weapon in the game



» To break up the standard platforming sections, there are a few shoot-'em-up levels high above Gotham City

OPERATION WOLF

YOU HAVE SUSTAINED A LETHAL INJURY



- » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** ACTION
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+



HISTORY

Don't worry; this isn't going to be a 300-word argument on whether *Operation Wolf* is an actual lightgun game or not (we'll leave that for another day). No, this is simply a chance to pay homage to a game that enabled you to blow away hordes of enemies for the paltry sum of two ten pences.

First released in 1987, Taito's *Operation Wolf* immediately stood out thanks to its huge cabinet and fantastic art design. Oh, and the fact that it had a replica Uzi sub-machine gun strapped to the front of it probably helped as well…

Set over six increasingly challenging stages, your goal was to destroy a set number of enemies, while avoiding or rescuing the many civilians that always seemed to appear at the most inappropriate moments. Although you only had a set number of bullets and rockets, extra ammunition was carelessly placed around each stage and could be collected with a carefully aimed shot. Failing that you could gain more by simply shooting at the pigs, vultures or chickens that would appear at certain points in the game, and let's face it that's much more fun.

All this extra ammo was soon put to good use though, as Taito absolutely swarmed you with enemies. As well as facing off against a variety of different enemy soldiers, you also had to contend with choppers, armoured tanks, riverboats and much more. Needless to say, the game's vehicles took a fair amount of bullets before they exploded, so your best friend was a well-placed rocket.

What really made *Operation Wolf* though, wasn't the cool cutscenes, fantastically detailed sprites or hectic gameplay, no it was that bloody big Uzi that you got to use. Feeling the gun shudder away against your arm while you took down wave after wave of enemy soldiers was immensely satisfying and delivered an experience that few other games of the time were able to match – providing of course that the thing was actually working!





460
=5
ENEMIES
38 3
HOSTAGE
0
DAMAG





SUPER SONIC

IN THE NINETIES, THERE WAS A GAMING ICON THAT MADE SEGA A HOUSEHOLD NAME. THAT CHARACTER WAS SONIC THE HEDGEHOG. NOW OVER 15 YEARS YOUNG, KIM WILD TAKES A LOOK AT THE HEDGEHOG'S LEGACY

When Sonic first hit the Mega Drive in 1991, he was an unknown entity. What made him stand out was his incredible speed. His success was ensured with *Sonic 2*, but branching off into the world of karting, racing, pinball and board games didn't always work as intended, and the 3D versions have received mixed reactions.

Yet despite some dubious games, Sonic remains a popular icon. Yuji Naka thinks his image plays a key part. "I think it's his characteristics of speed and coolness that make him as popular now as in the past," he explains. "No other character really has his traits and that's what makes Sonic so special."

As for Sonic's transition from 2D to 3D, Naka still feels that there's no reason why the two styles can't co-exist side by side. "If there is something to gain, there is also going to be something to lose," he cryptically begins. "There are pros and cons to both 2D and 3D. I think it is what kind of enjoyment the player gets from the various forms that actually matters."

Naka was keen to tell us about the new Xbox 360 and PlayStation3 title, which became available at the end of 2006, 15 years after Sonic's first outing. "We [released] *Sonic The Hedgehog* for Sonic's 15th anniversary, which has the same name as the first Mega Drive title," he proudly tells us. "Timed with this special occasion of 15 years, and the transition to the new next-generation of consoles, we [tried] to create a title with the basis being that Sonic is going back to the basics of 'speed', but still full of surprises."



1991
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (MEGA DRIVE)

The game that kick-started it all and made Sonic the superstar he is today. Here the formula for the series is set: collecting 100 rings rewards Sonic with an extra life (over 50 accesses the Special Stage), finding all the Chaos Emeralds unlocks another ending and the end of each act sees Sonic against either Dr Robotnik or one of his cronies to complete the world. Green Hill Zone is a constant source for familiarity of the series, re-appearing under different guises. Defeating the robot enemies means that the animals are freed from their metallic prisons, creating joy for animal lovers everywhere. The Special Stage of the original game consisted of a frustrating rotating maze where Sonic had to be steered to the Chaos Emerald.

1991
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (GAME GEAR/MASTER SYSTEM)

No, you're not hallucinating; *Sonic the Hedgehog* on the Game Gear was a different game to the Mega Drive version, which proved disappointing for those expecting a straight conversion. At the time, the visuals were a great showcase for what the handheld could do and although it has been surpassed technically, it still remains very playable today. This time round, the special stage saw Sonic bouncing on springs collecting as many coins and continues as possible in the bumper-filled environment. Chaos Emeralds were instead hidden around the levels, so searching every nook and cranny was essential to locate them all. A few months later the game was converted to the Master System, which is the same, with some of the sprites made slightly larger for a big screen.



» *Sonic the Hedgehog*'s bonus stage may have looked amazing, but it was a bitch to play through

1992
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 (GAME GEAR/MASTER SYSTEM)

Contrary to opinion, the Game Gear version of *Sonic 2* came out first although again is a different game to the Mega Drive. Tails made his debut here but unfortunately this was solely in the introduction, which saw Dr Robotnik abducting him, leaving Sonic to come to the rescue. Again, Chaos Emeralds had to be found hidden in the levels. A slightly wayward camera made boss battles trickier than they should have been, something remedied in the Master System conversion. No Special Stages.

1992
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 (MEGA DRIVE)

With Sonic's popularity cemented, Sega went all out on a huge marketing campaign, naming the release date 'Sonic 2sday'. This time, Tails, known as Miles Prower, accompanied the hedgehog and could be controlled by a second player. The game also included a two-player mode, competitive mode and introduced for the first time seven Chaos Emeralds over the standard six. The Special Stage, which consists of Sonic and Tails racing down a chute collecting rings, is the best of all the games, although Tails does get in the way of the bombs. *Sonic 2* was also the first appearance of Super Sonic. After collecting all of the chaos emeralds, getting 50 rings would enable Sonic to transform into a yellow invincible hedgehog and the rings acted as a timer, only increasing with the collection of additional rings. Interesting fact: foxes in Japanese legend are magical and mystical creatures that sometimes grow two tails.

1993
SONIC CHAOS AKA SONIC & TAILS (GAME GEAR/MASTER SYSTEM)

For some reason, the games had their names changed with America and Europe knowing the game as *Sonic Chaos*, and Japan calling it *Sonic & Tails*. As a first on the Game Gear/Master System, it was possible to play the game as Sonic or Tails, although with the latter you couldn't collect Chaos Emeralds or see the ending. After collecting 100 rings, you were warped to the Special Stage.



» Sonic takes a rest and decides to bomb around in a minecart. Watch out for those spikes!



» Sonic yet again shows his trademark impatience if you keep him waiting



» Nope, we don't know what's going on either








» The Master System version of *Spinball* suffers from poor visibility. Shame

1993
SONIC CD (MEGA CD)

Sonic CD was the only game to be released on Sega's failing add-on, yet its impressive size and unique gameplay meant that it still managed to impress the hedgehog's fanbase. For a long time before release, the game was rumoured to be a remake of *Sonic 2* with added animated sequences, but this wasn't the case. As a first, the game features an extensive animated introduction showcasing the power of the CD format although the opening tune differs depending on the whether you own the Jap or European version. Sonic has the ability to warp into the past and the future using designated signposts, the state of which will differ depending on whether or not Robotnik's roboticiz2er is destroyed in the past of each act. Several new characters were introduced including Amy Rose, the obsessive pink female hedgehog infatuated with our hero, and Metal Sonic, a metallic robot with the skills that Sonic possesses. It's also the first game to feature multiple endings, with the good ending taking place if all time stones are collected and all the roboticizer's are destroyed. The Special Stage is in complete 3D, the objective being to destroy the alien spaceships within the time limit while running along a track and avoiding the various hazards.

1993
SONIC SPINBALL (MEGA DRIVE/ GAME GEAR)

As a concept this really should have worked, especially after the superb Casino Zone of *Sonic 2* but the controls were not as responsive as they should have been. The Game Gear version was a condensed port of its big brother, but the smaller screen meant that it was difficult to see what was going on.

1993
DR ROBOTNIK'S MEAN BEAN MACHINE (MEGA DRIVE/MASTER SYSTEM/GAME GEAR)

If you've ever played this and thought it bore a striking resemblance to the *Puyo Puyo* series then you'd be right; it's the same game repackaged for the Western audience. The aim is to align four beans of the same colour together to make them disappear, creating chains of combos until your opponent's screen (or your own) overflows. The animation style is based on the cartoon series *The Adventures Of Sonic The Hedgehog* back in the Nineties, which is why Dr Robotnik appears to have had a makeover. Luckily, *Puyo Puyo* is a decent game to start with and as a result, *Mean Bean Machine* is as addictive as ever. It's worth noting that the Game Gear version (available on Tec Toy for Master System) is superior due to the inclusion of a puzzle mode.

1994
SONIC DRIFT (GAME GEAR)

Although this game was conceived and released before the SNES's *Super Mario Kart*, the fact that it was only released in Japan and utter tripe meant that very few gamers paid it any real attention. Playable characters include Sonic, Tails, Amy and Dr Eggman himself who all have special abilities on the track when more than two rings are collected. A rather poor game that even the most ardent Sonic fan may find hard to enjoy.

1994
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3 (MEGA DRIVE)

Back to what he does best, *Sonic 3* is a mammoth platform game that first introduces Knuckles, who to









begin with is on Dr Robotnik's team. Although there are only two acts, the levels themselves are larger in scope and include plenty of mini-bosses to ensure that the action stays as fast paced as ever. The Special Stages take on a different guise having you travel along a grid collecting only the blue spheres, with contact with a red sphere throwing Sonic back onto the main level. A strong adaptation of the series that proved that Sonic Team was more than willing to explore new avenues for its cherished mascot.

1994
SONIC & KNUCKLES (MEGA DRIVE)

Essentially more of the same in comparison to *Sonic 3*, this game had the added bonus of Lock-On Technology, enabling gamers to add new features to other *Sonic* titles. Plugging in *Sonic 2* or *3* into the top of the cartridge meant it was possible to play as Knuckles in those games. With *Sonic 3*, it doubled the size of the game by adding seven Chaos Emeralds, bringing the total to 14. While it's seen by many as Sonic's greatest Mega Drive outing, we still prefer the amazing *Sonic 2*.



» It may be *Puyo Puyo* in disguise, it's still great fun

1994
SONIC TRIPLE TROUBLE (GAME GEAR)

The best in the series for the Game Gear, *Sonic Triple Trouble* once again sees Sonic or Tails trying to beat Robotnik at his own game. Ramps, springs, carts and jumps were more prominent than in any other Game Gear/Master System title with varied bosses to tackle. It was the first game on the handheld to see the character Nack the Weasel (also known as Fang) who appears at the end of Special Stages and must be defeated to gain a Chaos Emerald.

1995
KNUCKLES CHAOTIX (32X)

The concept of team play was introduced here although the game was not favourably received by the public. Characters from the arcade game such as Vector the Crocodile, Charmy the Bee and Espio the Chameleon appeared and each partnership was joined together by a ring. Each character differed in ability: Knuckles could climb walls while Charmy could fly in the air. Sonic fans may want to track it down, but it's no traditional Sonic title.

1995
TAILS SKY PATROL (GAME GEAR)

Tails gets to star in his first standalone title, which was only ever available in Japan at time of release. It's a strange addition to the Sonic canon, with Tails carrying a ring across the levels, which has to be used to defeat enemies and progress through the game. Awkward controls and a weird camera angle make it difficult and frustrating to play.

1995
TAILS ADVENTURE (GAME GEAR)

Another variation on the Sonic franchise, this one (also featuring Tails) is more of a puzzle game with the emphasis on collecting items. Despite the change in style, it's a remarkably playable title that's becoming increasingly difficult to find at a decent price. Instead of Dr Robotnik, an army of strange looking birds have invaded Tails Holiday Island and set it on fire, leaving it to Tails to rescue his friends.

1995
SONIC LABYRINTH (GAME GEAR)

Sonic returns in yet another twist to the platform formula, this time in the vein of a *Marble Madness* clone. The fight against the time limit means that you constantly have to use Spin Dash to get anywhere, taking care not to go too fast as death lurks around every corner. Not a great game, but it has its moments (plus a great soundtrack).

1995
SONIC DRIFT 2 (GAME GEAR)

Mario Kart-style racing returns, but this time round everything has been greatly improved. Better controls, a



» A bit more thought was required to get through the levels



» Sonic Drift 2 may have been an improvement, but Mario Kart still ruled



» The visuals don't do the game any favours at all







» The arcade version of *Sonic The Fighters* was rarely seen in Europe



» **Above:** Sadly, the only racing game featuring Sonic that gets it right **Below:** Despite the adventure elements, *Sonic Adventure* remains an enjoyable title



more advanced Grand Prix mode and a nifty two-player link-up option make this a worthy game in the series. Hell, we'd take an update of this over *Sonic Riders* any day of the week.

1996
SONIC BLAST/G SONIC (GAME GEAR)

Sonic Blast (*G Sonic* in Japan) is a 2D-style game that was let down badly by poor controls and bland level design. It was the first and only Game Gear game to allow you to control Knuckles. In a bid to push the boundaries, all characters have been created with pre-rendered graphics and look appalling – too imposing for the small screen. The special stages were in full 3D and visually impressive for the Game Gear.

1996
SONIC CHAMPIONSHIP/SONIC THE FIGHTERS (ARCADE)

A primitive fighting game in the *Virtua Fighter* mould, this arcade title only appeared in a few European arcades, although Sonic devotees can now play it on the *Sonic Gems Collection* that's available for the GameCube and PlayStation2. Its simplicity meant that it never really garnered much of a following outside of native Japan and is best viewed as a curio item only.

1996
SONIC 3D FLICKIES' ISLAND/ SONIC 3D BLAST (MEGA DRIVE/SATURN/PC)

Developed by Traveller's Tales rather than Sonic Team, *Flickies' Island* stood out by having a 3D overhead perspective. Although the basics of Sonic remain, this time round the Flickies (the cute birds in the arcade and Mega Drive title *Flicky*) have been scattered across the levels and have to be rescued. The Saturn and Mega Drive games are similar apart from the former boasting enhanced visuals and a far superior soundtrack.

1997
SONIC R (SATURN/PC)

The only racing game that makes the Sonic name proud, this effort also came from the heart of Traveller's Tales. Although short, there are six unlockable racers including Doctor Robotnik, Metal Sonic, Tails Doll, Metal Knuckles, Egg Robo and Super Sonic, all of which handle differently. And the soundtrack boasts some of the best music that Richard Jacques has ever composed. If you haven't got a large grin on your face while listening to *Can You Feel The Sunshine?* you're probably already dead.

1997
SONIC JAM (GAME.COM)

Not to be confused with the compilation of the same name on the Sega Saturn, *Sonic Jam* on the Game.com threw in elements from *Sonic 2* and *3* but was a complete travesty. Monochrome screen aside, speed of gameplay was sluggish, rendering Sonic's speed down to a snail-like crawl. One of the worst Sonic games we've ever been unfortunate enough to play.

1998
SONIC ADVENTURE (DREAMCAST)

As the first true 3D title, Dreamcast owners were wowed by the sheer speed and graphical trickery that was contained in a shiny disc. *Sonic Adventure* was released three times in all: the first edition in Japan, the second a limited edition released in selected areas of the US, while the third, *Sonic Adventure International,* was released worldwide. Aside from being able to play the game with each individual character (and collect emblems), a virtual pet Chao was introduced which could be transferred to a Dreamcast VMU card. In 2001, *Sonic Adventure DX* was released: a port of the original for the GameCube including new mission modes, 12 unlockable Game Gear games and the ability to transfer a Chao to the Game Boy Advance. Amazingly, the main game was a poor port, meaning that the Dreamcast version is still the one to own.



» Board games and hedgehogs do not mix





» This port of *Sonic Advance* suffers due to the N-Gage's narrow screen

1999
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG POCKET ADVENTURE (NEO GEO POCKET COLOR)

A port of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* minus Tails, this is an excellent conversion and although the levels are visually toned down, everything is intact including the tunnel Special Stage. Features included a picture puzzle section where pieces could be collected across the levels and time trials for each stage. It was possible to link up with another machine for two-player races and was originally intended to make use of the NGPC to Dreamcast cable, but sadly this didn't get implemented in the final version.

2000
SONIC SHUFFLE (DREAMCAST)

A spin-off board game copying the *Mario Party* series, *Sonic Shuffle* was a poor effort that combined copious mini games around the Sonic universe. Playing as either Sonic, Tails, Amy or Knuckles (Big the Cat, E-102 Gamma, Super Sonic and a Chao can be unlocked), you must travel around the board and then depending on where you land, collect rings, play a game or battle with the eventual aim to collect as many precious stones as possible. The cell-shaded visuals worked well, but the mini-games weren't much fun to play and the slow movement of other characters dragged playability down considerably.

2001
SONIC ADVENTURE 2 (DREAMCAST)

Even bigger than before, *Sonic Adventure 2* abandoned the exploration elements of the original and stuck to speed, shooting and hunting for emeralds. It was the first game in the series to introduce Hero and Dark sides to play with, the latter allowing you to play as the infamous Shadow the Hedgehog and Eggman. Chao mode was also back with added features. To tie in with Sonic's 10th Anniversary, a special pack was released in Japan including a commemorative book, gold coin and soundtrack. In 2004, the game ported to the GameCube as *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle*, with an enhanced Chao mode and extra multi-player modes.

2002
SONIC ADVANCE (GAME BOY ADVANCE)

The first outing on Nintendo's handheld, *Sonic Advance* is a decent effort although it pales in comparison to the Neo Geo Pocket title. It's certainly a colourful game and is miles better than the more recent 3D efforts, but it still falls short of the original 16-bit classics.

2002
SONIC ADVANCE 2 (GAME BOY ADVANCE)

Much improved over the original, this sequel sees the appearance of new character, Cream the Rabbit, who appears in the storyline of *Sonic Rush* on DS. Special coins have to be collected to activate the Special Stage and although the game doesn't add anything new, all the trademark material is here.

2003
SONIC N (N-GAGE)

This isn't really a new game as it is essentially a port of *Sonic Advance,* but we're mentioning it here for completion reasons. Unfortunately, it took away any good aspects by not converting it properly to the smaller screen and omitting multi-player options. Oh and having to play it on a keypad doesn't help matters either. A decent effort, but stick with the original Game Boy Advance version.



» Sonic gets to spin a lot in this world



» New girl Cream gets into as much trouble as Amy





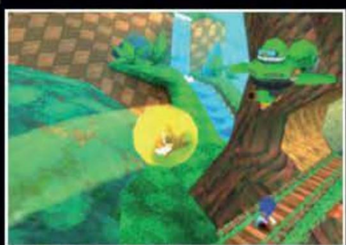




» The tag partner system adds a lot of depth and variety to the gameplay



» Sonic taking a rare break before tackling the rest of the level



» The PSP's *Sonic Rivals* looks great, but has some very frustrating levels

2003
SONIC PINBALL PARTY (GAME BOY ADVANCE)

After a failed attempt with *Sonic Spinball*, Sega managed to get the formula right this time with *Pinball Party* on the GBA. Featuring three tables, Sonic, Samba (based on the Dreamcast game) and Nights (focusing on the Saturn original), a certain number of rings have to be collected before Eggman can be taken on and defeated. The Sonic table is based on the zones featured in *Sonic Advance*. A solid game that will please pinball and Sonic fans alike.

2004
SONIC HEROES (GAMECUBE/PS2/XBOX)

Much like *Knuckles Chaotix*, *Sonic Heroes* used a tag-team system between three characters. The three characters between them had the ability of speed, power or flight on their side. Clumsy control and an obstinate camera meant it was a frustrating experience, although not completely without merit.

2004
SONIC ADVANCE 3 (GAME BOY ADVANCE)

Here the partner system returns, but with each character adding and taking away abilities, plenty of combinations need to be used to locate all the secrets. Chaos Emeralds are trickier than ever to collect, with all 70 Chao hidden in the game needing to be found to unlock the keys to the special stages. By far the best Sonic title currently available on the GBA.

2004
SONIC BATTLE (GAME BOY ADVANCE)

Another fighting game, this time in the style of *Smash Bros*, only nowhere near as impressive. Horrendous controls, appalling visuals and some questionable collision detection means that *Sonic Battle* is a travesty of a game that should be avoided at all costs.

2006
SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG (GAMECUBE/PS2/XBOX)

Again not really a *Sonic* game, but it's officially part of the canon so it's getting included here. Yuji Naka went on the record as saying Sega "wanted Shadow to be a different character to Sonic, as it also allows us to expand the possibilities for Sonic titles." Despite guns being available, they weren't as prominent as implied, but the generic gameplay and uninspiring level design meant that Shadow really was lingering in Sonic's wake.

2006
SONIC RIDERS (GAMECUBE/PS2/XBOX)

To commemorate the 15th anniversary of our beloved hedgehog, Sonic Team released *Sonic Riders*. Although visually it plays the part and features the frantic speed one



» Explosions are a-plenty with *Shadow*





expects from the series, the controls are poor, plus the blur effect while racing at high speed makes it incredibly difficult to enjoy. One for the younger fans only we're afraid.

2006
SONIC RUSH (NDS)

A 2D Sonic game that takes advantage of both screens, *Sonic Rush* is a blinding return to form and re-captures the magic of the earlier iterations. *Sonic Rush* introduces a new character called Blaze the cat, who handles in a similar way to Sonic and has a different storyline. Although only the touchscreen is used to collect Chaos Emeralds, all the classic ramps, springs and loops are back in a superb platform outing.

2006
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (PS3/XBOX 360)

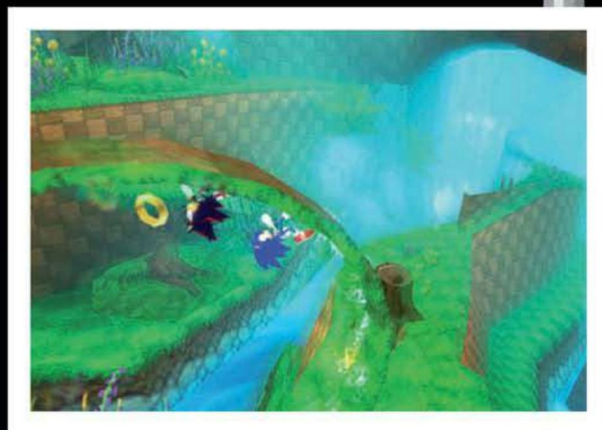
Oh dear, Sonic's all-new adventure promised so much, but in the end it turned out to be a bitter disappointment that added further fuel to the "Sonic should only be in 2D" debate that fuels various forums. While the crisp visuals promise a *Sonic Adventure*-styled experience, the frustrating camera, ridiculously sensitive Sonic and generic level design kills *Sonic the Hedgehog* before he's even had a chance to put his famous red shoes on. Shame…

2006
SONIC RIVALS (PSP)

Those of you who have a PSP and are jealously lusting after Sonic's recent debut on Nintendo's DS can get your own back with *Sonic Rivals*. It's a racing platformer that combines the classic 2D gameplay of old with 3D environments. Four different characters can be used with their own storyline and it will be possible to collect trading cards to customise their abilities. A fun addition to the *Sonic the Hedgehog* franchise.



» It looked nice, but *Sonic the Hedgehog* turned out to be very disappointing



2007
SONIC AND THE SECRET RINGS (WII)

Whilst it suffers with some familiar 3D issues, this is by far one of the greatest 3D Sonic games of recent memory and is a must for Sonic fans everywhere. Blisteringly fast, it perfectly captures the spirit of the original Mega Drive classic, but has more than enough new features to entice a whole new generation of gamers, plus it makes great use of the Wii's innovative controller.

NOTABLE OMISSIONS

There are some titles that weren't listed in the main article so here goes. Sonic appeared in educational titles including *Sonic Schoolhouse* on PC and on Sega Pico in *Sonic The Hedgehog's Gameworld*. *Sonic Eraser* had a limited release via download with the Mega Drive modem Meganet in Japan. There's also the unreleased *Sonic Xtreme* and *Sonic Crackers*, a prototype that was supposedly *Sonic 4*. More information on this can be found at **http://sonicology.fateback.com/beta/crackers/index.html**.

Oh and there's *SegaSonic*, a cool arcade game that's now extremely hard to track down… but we've run out of space.



» *Sonic Rush* is a real return to form and plays like a dream



BOSS/RUSH

WHEN YOU SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

WALLY THE WALRUS IN THE NEW ZEALAND STORY





» Tiki navigates his way through the deadly and slippery terrain, chased by some of the spikiest monsters imaginable



» In the final run towards the end of the level, the game throws every monster it has against poor Tiki, who has to make a mad rush through the middle

GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

Having battled his way through some of the most dangerous and unusual territory that New Zealand has to offer, Tiki the Kiwi finally arrives at the venue for his showdown with the evil Wally the Walrus. Tiki had a brief encounter with the evil walrus at the beginning of the game; where he watched it kidnap and imprison all his friends. Determined to rescue them once and for all, the little bird takes his first step into the icy terrain.

The ground is treacherous, covered almost completely in ice, and the poor kiwi finds that he's slipping at every step. Some very deft control is required to stop him from sliding from the edge of one of the platforms into one of dozens of spike-filled pits that are scattered throughout.

Things don't start off easy. A precarious bridge of platforms stretches its way into the air, forcing the beleaguered bird to jump from one platform to the next. He has little opportunity to react to the monsters around him, as even a minor trip sends him falling to the ground beneath, forcing him to retrace his steps back to the start of the bridge. With the crossing behind him, Tiki starts to ascend into the upper reaches of the mountain.

As he works his way through, the number of enemies steadily increases, forcing Tiki to jump and dive rapidly in order to avoid being spiked by a spear or hit by one of the many prickly baddies that are flying through the air.

Finally a large open plateau is reached near the top of the level. The end is in sight – but first a barrage of enemy activity must be faced as the game throws everything it can muster at Tiki in a final attempt to stop him in his tracks. This section can be a mad rush as the little bird is attacked from multiple directions. However, a smart kiwi uses this as a last opportunity to grab hold of a powerful weapon or an armed vehicle, essential in the battle that is about to begin.

As Tiki makes his way through the final doorway into Wally's lair, he realises that it is a single huge pit, the floor of which is entirely lined with deadly spikes. The final face-off is therefore conducted in the air to avoid otherwise certain death.

Right on cue, Wally makes his appearance. He's huge and hanging from a giant inflatable balloon (well, what else did you expect?). Armed with a bazooka, Wally floats up and down in front of Tiki, apparently impervious to any weapons that Tiki fires at him. The balloon is his weak spot, however, and it is this that Tiki must target in order to finally rid the world of his evil nemesis.

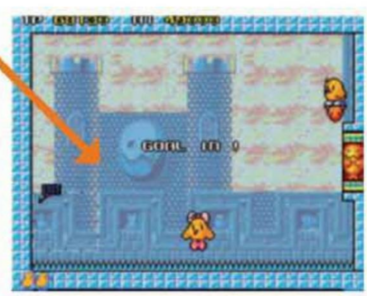
Firing shot after shot at the floating figure in front of him, Tiki keeps his distance as best as possible to avoid the repeated shots fired towards him. As he valiantly works towards his goal, the walrus floats ever closer, leaving Tiki ever decreasing amounts of room to move.

Finally, with a loud "Pop!" the balloon bursts, sending Wally plummeting to his icy fate far below. With his friends safe, Tiki, his girlfriend Phee-Phee and all of the other kiwis are finally safe. Thank you for playing, see you again!

"WALLY FLOATS UP AND DOWN IN FRONT OF TIKI, APPARENTLY IMPERVIOUS TO ANY WEAPONS"



» Wally makes his appearance, armed and dangerous, suspended above a sea of lethal spikes



» With the evil walrus vanquished, Tiki can finally be reunited with all of the friends that he rescued along the way

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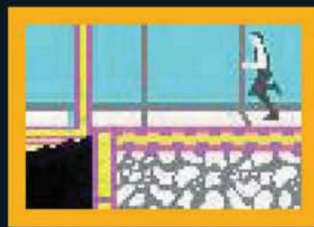
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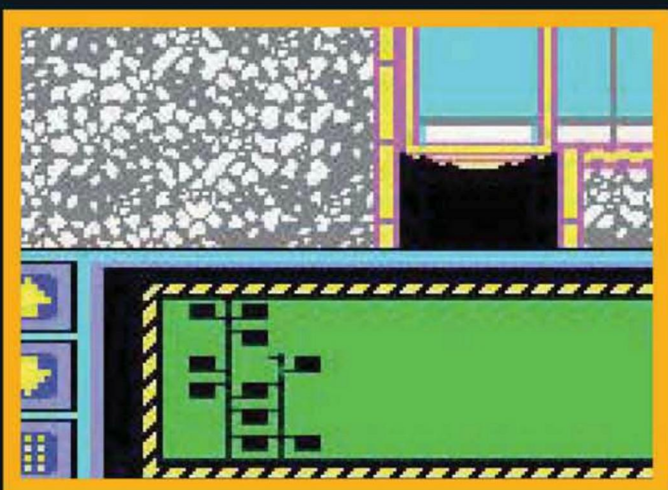
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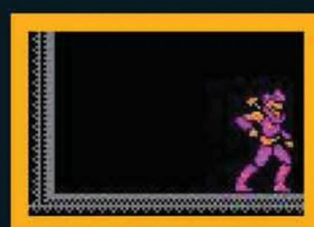

DAVID CROOKES FIND TIME TO CHAT WITH GEOFF BROWN, THE FOUNDER OF US GOLD















Geoff Brown shows that telling lies can actually lead to success after buying some games from America and persuading Curry's that he was the official importer of the said titles. After setting up distribution company CentreSoft, Geoff developed US Gold – a company that brought countless classic American and, eventually, Japanese games to British shores. With links to Ocean and Gremlin, US Gold became one of Britain's best-known and largest videogame companies



» A casual Geoff Brown contemplates a career that helped shape British videogaming.

In the Eighties, Britain was invaded by America. And the man behind it all was British. From the moment Geoff Brown created US Gold, American game imports flooded the market and the face of videogaming changed forever. David Crookes looks at the impact made by this legendary Birmingham company.

Imagine how much poorer Britain would have been in the Eighties without the joy of American-produced games. For a start, we wouldn't have enjoyed *Impossible Mission*.

Yet had it not been for Geoff Brown, an unsung legend of videogaming, such a scenario could well have existed.

For Brown was the man behind US Gold, a well-known company that specialised in bringing the best of America to British shores, later going on to cultivate links with major Japanese companies.

Today, we take for granted that we can play games created across the globe, but in the early days of videogaming, the British bedroom programmers were the main source of pixellated enjoyment. And although developers such as Jeff Minter were doing a wonderful job in creating many fresh titles, the gaming world remained insular and fragmented – with many UK coders believing themselves to be at the very forefront of the industry, if only because they were unaware of what was being produced elsewhere in the world.

In 1982, Brown was a professional musician and a maths teacher at the Leckie School in Wallsall. He had also just bought himself an Atari 800 having become fascinated by computers in the Sixties while working as a programmer on ICL1900s for British Leyland.

Brown snapped up several British-made computer games but picked up a copy of US magazine *Compute!* from Woodroffe's music shop in Birmingham, which, at the time, was selling Atari consoles.

He sent cheques to the States for a couple of games featured in the magazine's review section and was amazed by their quality. "They were streets ahead of the UK product," he says. And then Brown made a bold move and demonstrated them to the manager of Curry's in Birmingham. "He loved one of them – *Galactic Chase* on cassette," Brown says. "He said he wanted to sell it and I told him I was the exclusive UK distributor for the game, which was a lie, but he ordered some copies from me." The game was Brown's first – and the start of many – lucky breaks.

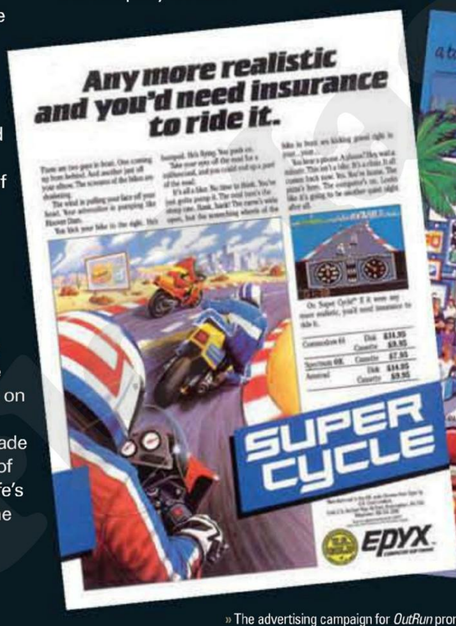
He says: "I contacted the US software company and ordered 100 copies. I was given an account and credit terms straight away! I brought them in by post having no idea how to clear customs or even how to raise an invoice. I then delivered them to Curry's and they sold out almost immediately and ordered more. At this stage, I had spent nothing except postage. Curry's paid me before I had to pay the States, so I paid the States and ordered more. I was an official distributor! I called the company Softcell."

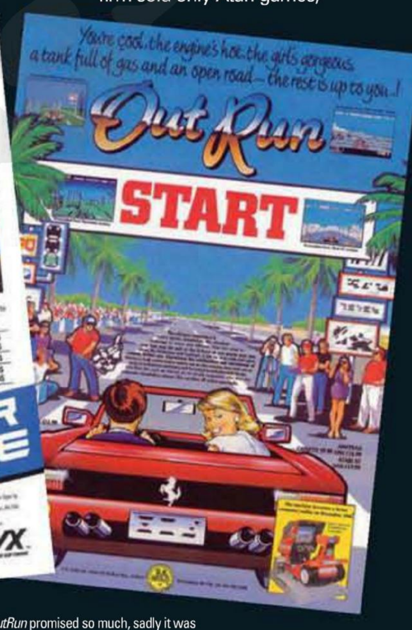
The second lucky break came when the manager at the Birmingham branch of Curry's was promoted to the role of UK buyer for computer games and Brown was given the commission to supply all British stores. At the same time, an American company called Softcell attempted to sue Brown for stealing its name – but instead persuaded Brown to change his firm's name, which he did, to CentreSoft Distribution.

By this time, the firm was growing so fast, Brown gave up his teaching job, despite having just £300 life savings and no business experience. Together with his first wife, Anne, he went full time into distribution. He looked after the products while his wife looked after the business side. CentreSoft Distribution grew at an exponential rate and before long it was Britain's largest games distributor, supplying many independent stores and also High Street multiples. Initially, the firm sold only Atari games,



» US Gold was based in this building in Birmingham, where CentreSoft ran its distribution business





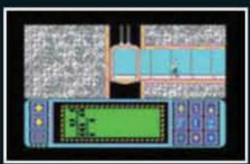
» The advertising campaign for *OutRun* promised so much, sadly it was nowhere near as good as it could have been

US GOLD

FINEST HOUR

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

In 1986, US Gold literally struck gold with *Impossible Mission*, a true mid-Eighties classic. In releasing this game in Britain, US Gold allowed even more people to play as Agent 4125 in a bid to defeat evil Professor Elvin Atombender, scouring his underground complex for nuclear missile launch codes.



» Agent 4125's adventure is timeless, check out the making of on page 36

imported from America and not manufactured or published by CentreSoft. Then came the Eureka! moment…

In Salt Lake City, Utah, a Mormon development group called Access Software led by programmer Bruce Carver had created a Commodore 64 game called *Beach Head*. Carver was a consulting engineer who had bought a C64 for $800 and had already achieved small success with a graphics utility called *Spritemaster* and a game called *Neutral Zone*.

At the same time as Bruce Carver was showing off his new game, Brown had decided to go to America to visit publishers.

Aged 37, it was his first time in the USA and he wasn't sure what sort of reception he was going to find. "They were all doing great business in America and in I walked from a little island called the UK and asked them for publishing rights to their games," Brown laughs.

"They really had nothing to lose and only asked for a guaranteed number of unit sales in the year and sometimes a small advance."

When Brown visited Access, he was stunned. He instantly fell in love with *Beach Head*, snapping up the rights in Britain. He decided it would be the perfect game for his new fledgling company, which was to become known as US Gold.

Brown says: "*Beach Head* was a revolution. It was streets ahead, quality-wise, of UK games at the time and gave all the British developers a benchmark. It just looked so professional and some UK publishers were actually astounded by it. As soon as I saw it, I knew I would have to grab the rights and since it went on to sell a million units, I was certainly right to do so."

> "BEACH HEAD WAS A REVOLUTION. IT WAS STREETS AHEAD, QUALITY-WISE, OF UK GAMES AT THE TIME AND GAVE ALL THE BRITISH DEVELOPERS A BENCHMARK. IT JUST LOOKED SO PROFESSIONAL"
>
> GEOFF BROWN

Brown wanted to do more than merely distribute other company's games. He wanted to publish and market them under a fresh brand, making them available on other computer formats if they were not already available.

As a massive music fan, Brown had envisaged a different kind of videogame publisher. He wanted it to be similar to a music label that had many artists on it. Snapping up *Beach Head* immediately put US Gold on the map and helped it to attract other great games.

In the past it has been pointed out that *Beach Head* did for US Gold what Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* did for Virgin.

But why the name US Gold? During his trip to America, Brown had also visited Datasoft, Synapse, Cosmi and Epyx. ("Today it reads like a Who's Who of early games companies," he says.) It was during his visit to Cosmi, that he began talking to owner George Johnson about marketing.

Cosmi had a range of music called Gold Hits and both agreed it was a good name for the collection because it conjured up images of quality. "I must have filed that thought away," Brown says. "On arriving back in the UK with all these fabulous titles I was convinced I needed a brand to pull them together into a cohesive range. I remember waking up in the middle of the night with the name 'US Gold – All American Software', a bit like 'All American Boy' and that was it. I dashed off the next morning to our graphic designers and briefed them on it. In early versions of our ads and marketing there was the tag-line 'All American Software', but I soon dropped that in favour of US Gold."

As well as snapping up top games, Brown made another decision. He put up the price of games.

"Games at the time were selling for around £4 to £5," he says. "I decided to sell US Gold games at the premium price of £9.99 on cassette and support them with full-page ads in the consumer mags. It changed the whole dynamic of the market at the time."

After *Beach Head*, which sold a million copies, Access released two sequels, *Raid Over Moscow* and *Beach Head 3*.

And soon enough US Gold was releasing several great games each month, taking up to ten pages of advertisements in the leading magazines. It caused a love-hate relationship between the publications and US Gold.

Tim Chaney, US Gold's former managing director, says: "The magazines were very receptive because we were huge advertisers. We didn't 'buy' good reviews but we were quick to call if we felt hard done by, pulling advertising. We fell out with CTW (the No.1 and only trade paper) for a year because we didn't like something they said about us. We were sensitive types. These were still cottage industry times: lots of small developers, small software houses, people coming in with a bang and disappearing soon after. A lot of people were wet behind the ears but giving it their best shot – magazines liked that because they were the same. US Gold was seen as some ugly business machine from Birmingham who played the game with rules it made. There was a lot of resentment; less about our success, more about our attitude. Well, both – you know the English disease."

US Gold had rapidly become the most prolific publisher in Europe, despite having no development resources and relying on licensing titles from the US.

But that had to change. The release of the popular Spectrum 48k machine in 1982 was by now beginning to have a big impact on US Gold since all of its products were for the Atari or Commodore 64.





» Atari's *Gauntlet* was just one of the many arcade conversions that was released under the US Gold banner – it was actually a good conversion as well

As the market quickly grew for the Spectrum, an important decision in the growth of US Gold had to be made on how to address that market and move with the times.

The answer was simple – go with the flow and cater for the Spectrum market. Brown says: "I made the decision to convert the games to the Spectrum which meant I needed a development resource and all the management that went with it. CentreSoft had grown to be the largest distribution company in the UK and we stocked and distributed games from all the well-known UK publishers.

Apart from *Ultimate – Play the Game*, which was Spectrum only, our biggest supplier was Ocean Software run by two guys, David Ward and John Woods, out of their offices in Liverpool."

Brown decided that Ward and Woods had the best resources and expertise to carry out the porting of games to the Spectrum. In return, they were handed a stake in US Gold.

"They accepted that," Brown says. "Actually, it's a little-known fact that some of the early Spectrum conversions of US Gold's titles were in fact programmed through Ocean, and they had an equity stake in US Gold. At first it was a great idea. I got the conversions I needed and the only cost was the share of the company they had, but that situation became problematic in a couple of ways."

It was a bizarre situation. Ocean was US Gold's biggest competitor but was developing the Birmingham-based firm's Spectrum game code. US Gold soon had more titles and licenses than Ocean could cope with.

Brown says: "There was a major conflict of interest for me and them to really put US Gold at the top of their priorities. At the same time I was Ocean's biggest customer with my distribution company, CentreSoft. It was very convoluted set of relationships. I was, in a way, forced to take the lead and start placing my development with other studios and be independent of Ocean. Looking back, I suppose I should have started straight away with creating my own development team rather than have approached Ocean in the first place, but the speed at which the market was growing meant I could very quickly establish US Gold as a major label on home-grown machines much faster. Also, the relationship with Ocean and its success had benefits to me. We dominated the market for a long time and worked together on ad buying, marketing and compilations – in fact, I think I was the first person in the UK to create and recognise the strength of compilations. There was eventually a very expensive price to pay, several million pounds, to buy them out of US Gold when we went public, but I think it was worth it."

By this time, US Gold had expanded the brands it was representing to Epyx, Access, Datasoft, Cosmi, Microprose, Lucasarts, Synapse, SSI, Origin, Artech (*Ace of Aces*), Accolade, Sydney (*Dambusters*), Arena (Dropzone), Atari Games, Sega, Chris Gray (*Infiltrator*), JV (*Mystic Mansion*), Delphine (*Flashback*), Capcom and many UK developers.

One of the British developers that worked with US Gold was based in a small shop in Sheffield run by Ian Stewart, who had a game called *Monty Mole*!



» From games champ to playtester, Simon Hadlington's life was once dominated by US Gold

LUCKY BREAK

WHEN *Zzap!64* carried an advertisement for the US Gold/Boys Club games championship, lads up and down the country jumped with excitement. And among those who entered was proud Commodore 64 owner Simon Hadlington. There were local heats up and down the country, and as Hadlington lived in Stourbridge, this was the heat he went to.

US Gold was local and had a big presence at the championships with the head of communications, Danielle Woodyatt, popping along. Hadlington got through the London final after playing *Bionic Commando* on the C64 and *Roadblasters* on the Spectrum, but lost in the final… to illustrious and well-known journalist Stuart Campbell.

But Hadlington says: "On the back of this I got a job at US Gold as a playtester and Stuart and I were asked to go to Paris for the 1989 European Games championships with Julian Rignall and Paul Glancey, and soundly beat the French, Italians, Germans and Dutch. Being offered the job at US Gold was unbelievable. My mates at school were really jealous. Playing games for a living was great."

After working for US Gold during a gap year at Swansea University, Hadlington was offered a job as a producer in 1991 but turned it down in favour of returning to university. He continued to playtest for the publisher, however, roping in his uni mates to help. "I do often wonder what would have happened if I had accepted the job," he says.



» "To me, it was a war. I didn't want anyone else to exist" – Tim Chaney looks back at his role as US Gold commander

Q&A

TIM CHANEY

(EX-MANAGING DIRECTOR OF US GOLD)

Tim Chaney joined US Gold as general manager in February 1985. CND were picketing the building because of *Raid Over Moscow* at the time – "I remember it well," he says. "It was snowing. In the summer of 1986, he became managing director. Chaney worked on every US Gold game between February 1985 and April 1989. On many titles, he licensed the game, found the coders, planned the marketing and hit the sales budgets.

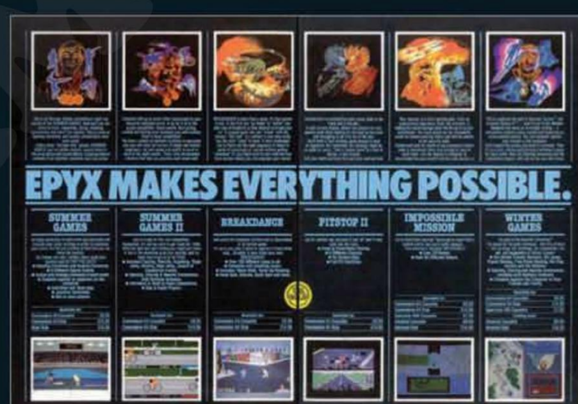
Retro Gamer: How would you rate US Gold's American-produced games in comparison to those made in Britain?
Tim Chaney: Generally the US games were higher quality than were being produced in the UK: *Beach Head, Raid Over Moscow, Summer Games, Winter Games, Microprose Flight Sims, Super Cycle, Dambusters, Leaderboard, Bruce Lee* and *Spy Hunter* immediately come to mind.

RG: How influential do you perceive US Gold to have been?
TC: Well, at its peak we represented the output of nearly 80 per cent of the US publishing output (Broderbund, Activision and EA were exceptions), but to continue to grow we expanded the business to coin-op conversions teaming up with Atari Games (*Gauntlet, 720°, Road Runner*, etc), Sega (*OutRun, Thunderblade*) and Capcom (*Street Fighter*, etc). In that time, US Gold became the biggest publisher in Europe, eclipsing Ocean and BT, and CentreSoft became the biggest distributor in the UK, having Menzies and Boots as exclusive accounts.

RG: What was it like working for Geoff and Anne?
TC: Geoff was an ideas guy; Anne the iron rod and numbers person. I was the operations guy who did most of the licensing, especially the Japanese coin-op stuff, all the marketing and managed the sales team. We were way ahead of our time in our strategy, marketing, aggression and arrogance. To me, it was a war. I didn't want anyone else to exist. We were ruthless.

RG: What was the most fun aspect of the company?
TC: All the fun, for me, was about winning: front covers, great reviews, Gallup No.1's and being competitive, and in 1985, 1986 and 1987 we were smoking. By 1988 I had an infrastructure around me and delegated a lot of things I used to do myself. I became bored with everything except power. I left in April 1989, set up my own publisher, Tecmagik, and then took over Virgin and grew it from $1m in 1991 to $200m by 1995 and was back at the top again – more mature and without most of the arrogance.

RG: And the worst?
TC: Often we would take lots of crap games from US publishers, not because we wanted them, but to stop anyone else getting a foot in the door – remember *Zorro, Time Tunnel, BC II Grog's Revenge, Beyond The Forbidden Forest, Superstar Ping Pong, The Goonies* and everything from Strategic Simulations Inc? Thought not. And, of course, there was *World Cup Carnival*…



» *Impossible Mission* and *Winter Games* were just a few of Epyx's hits

US GOLD



CND vigil at US Gold

West Midlands CND kept a two-hour vigil outside US Gold's Birmingham offices recently to protest against the "emotive nature" of *Raid Over Moscow*.

Raid Over Moscow was due for release on the Spectrum on the day of the CND protest, and the local CND received publicity in local newspapers and on the local radio station. The vigil was apparently "not antagonistic" and ended after two hours. There was a police presence throughout the vigil.

"Nuclear extermination"

"There were about 20 demonstrators," said Tim Chaney, general manager of US Gold. "They took a T-shirt and a copy of the game and asked Geoff Brown to withdraw the game, saying that it 'simulates nuclear extermination'.

There have been letters before from CND. They sent letters to Menzies Smiths and Boots when Nato Commander came out.

"Kill and maim"

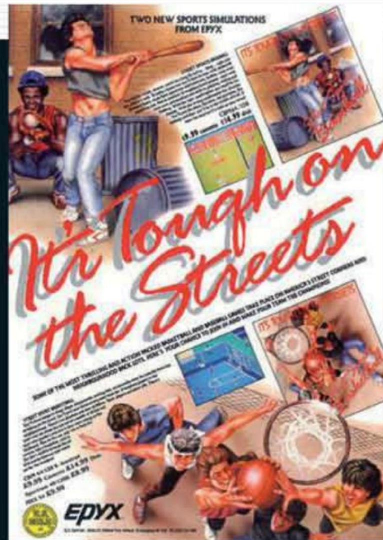
"I can't see the point – the object of Action Man which a lot of kids buy is to kill and maim. We're just bringing that game up to date."

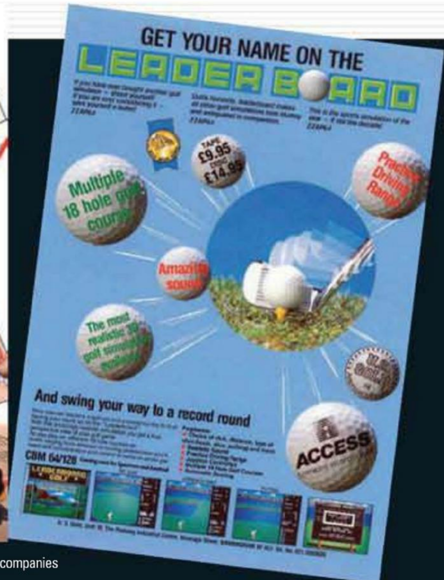
"It's revolting"

West Midlands CND confirmed that it had distributed leaflets saying "War games are not fun".

Marcus Lynch of the organisation said that *Raid Over Moscow* "trivialises the idea of nuclear war. We're not trying to put them out of business, just trying to make US Gold and consumers think twice".

CND's general secretary Monsignor Bruce Kent was keener to press home the point. "It's revolting," he told *CTW*. "Here you have a little man who tries to justify his position with totally banal comments. He talks about Action Man and says why don't we complain – well we do complain."





» Sure the ads may look dated, but there's no denying the impact that companies like Epyx made in the UK

THIS IS A RAID

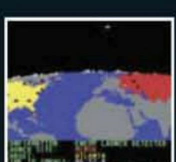
US Gold didn't just grab the attention of the computer press – at times, the national newspapers were interested in what was happening at Geoff Brown's company.

The most controversial game was *Raid Over Moscow*, the sequel to *Beach Head*, which worried the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The CND's chairman Bruce Kent had sleepness nights over ROM's content, which swapped the usual gaming fare of blasting aliens for nuking Russians in the Kremlin.

Not that Geoff Brown, who had brought the game to Britain from America, was too concerned. "A well-adjusted child is able to differentiate fantasy from reality," he said at the time. Nevertheless, the game was later rebranded to *Raid* when placed on the compilation *History In The Making – The First Three Years*.

Equally controversially, this 15-game anthology retailed for £24.99, which didn't go down too well in the computer press.



» The Red Army is in sight in one of the most controversial games ever made

Stewart always wanted to publish the game through his own publishing company, Gremlin Graphics. Brown loved the product so much that he took a stake in the company and the game went on to become a massive hit with the videogame-playing crowds.

Gremlin Graphics rode high on the success of the game and Brown says: "At one point, I owned the majority of Gremlin and sold it back to Ian for a nominal sum, who by then had married my sales manager and became a very good friend. He went on to float that company and become a millionaire in the process."

US Gold continued to base itself in Birmingham in a building linked to CentreSoft's warehouse, but it would later expand across Europe and the world, dominating the market as it went.

The development and testing department was on the ground floor where the production and PR people were also located. And production came to be managed by a down-to-earth chap called Bob Kenrick who looked after returned games that didn't load and the physical production of games onto tape or disk. The duplication of both US Gold and a lot of other companies' games was carried out at Ablex based in Telford, near Wolverhampton, where they also used to press most of the country's seven-inch singles.

Testing and development of the wide variety of games now available was managed by Tony Porter and Bob Armour (who created the original Spectrum version of *Gauntlet*) and later Steve Fitton.

And for people such as Simon Hadlington, a playtester for US Gold, there was no finer place to work.

He says: "No programming was done on-site, just mostly in peoples' own homes, with the exception of a few teams such as Tiertex (a large converted house in Didsbury, Manchester), Probe (a small office in Croydon), Creative Materials (an office in Bury) and Climax (a small office in Fareham). Testing happened predominantly on-site at US Gold or sat right next to the developers, wherever they were based. The latter was used both at the start and at the end of projects, particularly where timescales were tight." Hadlington's role is further looked at in the Lucky Break boxout on the previous page.

The next step in US Gold's development almost came by default. Most Spectrum games had been conversions from their US originals, but the arcade market was massive and Brown had developed connections through his visits to Japan with Capcom and Sega.

There weren't any original computer versions of the coin-op games, so Brown decided to convert them in the UK to British formats, opening them up to a larger audience.

"That was the beginning of a long string of coin-op hits like *OutRun*, *Gauntlet*, *720°*, and *Street Fighter*, which sold millions

GAMES REVIEWS



BEACH HEAD

ACCESS SOFTWARE, 1983

» *Beach Head*, billed as the ultimate war game, had you penetrating enemy defences in a number of battles utilising air, sea and land forces. You could take the enemy by surprise or attack head on. And the choice of single or multi-player made for a varied, fun game. It boasted great graphics and good sound effects, and was an enjoyable blast – it still is a great game today.

65%



STRIDER

CAPCOM, 1989

» A great fast-action platformer that was converted onto home machines by Tiertex. The home versions did a great job of capturing the spirit of the original game, even if they didn't look or sound quite as good… A favourite of our editor, *Strider* was a multi-load game on some formats which meant many frustrating waits. But it was worth it to play this undoubted classic.

85%



CALIFORNIA GAMES

EPYX, 1987

» While Ocean had Daley Thompson Supertest Games, US Gold was synonymous with the Olympics. Its deal with Epyx saw it import many multi-sport event games from America including *California Games*, which featured skateboarding, BMX racing, roller skating, foot bag, surfing and flying disc. A solid conversion that eventually became a huge hit on the later console systems.

70%



FINAL FIGHT

CAPCOM, 1991

» Sadly, by trying to stay faithful to the coin-op original this conversion of *Final Fight* was a bit of a disappointment. Nevertheless, its graphics were impressively large and colourful with massive sprites and smooth scrolling. Interestingly, to save manufacturing costs, one version had the Spectrum game on one side of a three-inch disc and the Amstrad one on the other.

65%

"US GOLD WAS ONE OF THE TOP PUBLISHERS IN THOSE DAYS SO EVERYONE WANTED TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THEM AND IT MEANT THEY GOT THE BEST GAMES, EVEN FROM THE BIG DEVELOPERS LIKE CAPCOM AND SEGA"

DANIELLE WOODYATT



» *Beach Head* on the C64 was an immediate hit for US Gold and was soon ported to other systems

of units," he says. "At the same time, I brought some of the development in-house as a US Gold development group and finally started to create original games and games based on events, personalities, movies, television and brands. We were innovating like mad on everything we did, as there were no precedents in those days. We were creating them as we went along."

After many games and licenses and millions of lines of code, US Gold had become one of the biggest brands in the UK games market and CentreSoft became the biggest distributor.

US Gold offices were opened throughout Europe and then in the USA and Japan. Several entrepreneur millionaires were created along the way and many key managers and companies that are still in the business today formed.

Danielle Woodyatt was a former head of communications for US Gold and now runs LunchPR. She says: "US Gold was one of the top publishers in those days so everyone wanted to be associated with them and it meant they got the best games, even from the big developers like Capcom and Sega. US Gold was the first company to bring LucasArts and Westwood into Europe and we had great ties with Sega – one title that was a major success was *OutRun*. The firm was proud of sourcing the best overseas software, with Geoff Brown being the first person to bring products in from America. The company had his first invoice on the wall in reception!"

In 1993, there was a public flotation of US Gold and the firm went on to acquire Core Design, makers of *Tomb Raider*. US Gold was eventually sold to Eidos in 1997, which subsequently dropped the name, but CentreSoft remains and is still the UK's largest games distributor.

Brown now lives in West Hollywood, Los Angeles, and is still enjoying the entertainment business. Last August, he was appointed to the board of ITVN, which pioneering the delivery of television on demand via the internet. He is also the chairman of a new UK application publishing company, JDP Software, and ILM, a company focused on the sourcing of licenses for the games industry. And, if that wasn't enough, he is on the Board of Gusto Games, which develops *Championship Manager* for Eidos on consoles.

He says: "My only regret with US Gold was staying around when we were a public company. I was just never really cut out for the corporate life and enjoyed the more creative and entrepreneurial side of the games business. To tell the truth, in the end it actually became a bit of a chore, a conveyor belt that I really couldn't step off, even though looking back, it was great fun." He adds: "When I look back, it was clear that US Gold had continued success because we ended up becoming the biggest brand. Ultimately, it was better to be with us than compete against us."



CHIP'S CHALLENGE

EPYX, 1989

» A big hit on the Atari Lynx, this tile-based puzzle game saw you play as Nerdy Chip who was desperate to join Melinda the Mental Marvel's 'Bit Busters' computer club. Chip had to prove his worth to Melinda by completing 150 difficult levels, using keys, shields, and special shoes. A great little puzzler that's been criminally overlooked in the past – check it out!

85%



LEADERBOARD

ACCESS, 1986

» Although there have been many, many great golf games since, *Leaderboard* stands out for being the first accurate representation. This magnificent golfing sim was easy to play, yet had a level of complexity depending on whether you chose to tee off as a novice, amateur or professional, in turn adding greater control over the shot or making you battle with wind directions. Brilliant.

90%



GAUNTLET

GREMLIN, 1986

» This coin-op hit stood head and shoulders above many in the mid-Eighties. Negotiating its 501 levels was tough and sadly, became more boring as you progressed, but there was no faulting the ambition of the conversion across the many formats it appeared on. Teamwork and co-operation were important and the game struck such a chord, it spawned many a clone.

88%



INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

LUCASARTS, 1985

» Enticing LucasArts on board was a coup for US Gold and the popular *Indiana Jones* was a perfect money-spinner. Unfortunately, as with many licenses, the game was quite poor with annoying music and a basic first level which didn't make you want to play much further. Those that did found the final level to go on and on and on…

50%



» An utter travesty of a game that deserved every low score it received

AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

WORLD CUP CARNIVAL

US Gold's biggest embarrassment was *World Cup Carnival* – *Amstrad Action* gave it 0%.

This official Mexico '86 World Cup was identical to Artic's terrible *World Cup Football* from 1984, only repackaged with posters and a badge. It was sold for £9.95 – £2 more than the original! Shocking stuff!



THE MAKING OF...

DRAGON'S LAIR

In a time when arcade games hosted basic graphics, there was one game that changed peoples' perspectives of games indefinitely. That game was Dragon's Lair, the first of its kind to feature movie-quality visuals and interactive gameplay. Kim Wild talks to Gary Goldman about this laser disc classic



For those unfamiliar with *Dragon's Lair,* the game starred Dirk the Daring, a bumbling oaf who has to enter a booby-trapped castle to rescue his girlfriend from a ferocious dragon. Unlike other arcade games of its time, or indeed our time, *Dragon's Lair* was more like an interactive movie, where the player would direct the main character in a series of sequences, than a platformer where you'd assume complete control. The outcome of each cartoon scene is determined by entering the right move at each decision point; make the wrong decision and you'll face immediate death.

The original concept came from Rick Dyer of Advanced Microcomputer Systems (AMS). The company had been working on a fantasy game for two years but wanted to make a more visual masterpiece. After methods of animation including slideshows and a tape deck, a cash till roll and a giant Rolodex failed to re-create a hand-drawn style, Rick Dyer began to look elsewhere. He discovered laser disc: a brand new optical storage



"WE CHANGED THE CONTINUITY OF GAME-PLAY, WHICH UPSET THE WRITERS AND STORYBOARD ARTISTS OVER AT RICK'S SHOP"

medium that had the ability to replicate movie-quality animation. Disc access was random and chapter-based so it allowed almost instant access to any area of the disc. One visit to the cinema later, and the idea for a partnership formed. Gary Goldman, a member of the production team for Don Bluth, recalls how this came about. "He [Dyer] had seen *The Secret of NIMH* in the theatre with his wife, Jan, and decided then that we should be the team to do the animation. He had already put a team of writers and artists together to write a game script and to storyboard the game in sequences. His plan was for a three-way partnership, with his team doing pre-production and the computer programming, Bluth Group was to do the actual production and Cinematronics to do the distribution."

However there were a few problems – namely a question of financing. "Each partner-company was to finance its own part of the deal," explains Goldman. "The problem for us was that we didn't have any capital. Our studio operations had just been interrupted by the Screen Cartoonists union strike, and our backers pulled out, leaving us with no cash flow. So we had to borrow cash to get involved, from friends, relatives, whoever we could convince that this was a solid idea. At one point we even borrowed from Rick Dyer's and Jim Pearce's companies."

DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Once financial issues had been resolved, it was time to make a start on development. Although Rick Dyer's team had designed their own characters and storyboards, many of these had to be discarded, as they didn't meet the required standards. In the end, character design and animation was left entirely to Don Bluth's production team while Dyer and his loyal designers kept working on ideas and programming the links between each scene. "We changed the continuity of gameplay, which upset the writers and storyboard artists over at Rick's shop," recalls Goldman "We basically re-storyboarded the game with new designs and sometimes completely different ideas. At the time Rick was very good about keeping his crew's objections from us, letting us plod on."

Daphne and Dirk also saw an overhaul. Dirk was remodelled as "a clumsy oaf, big feet and hands and not too smart" while Don Bluth spent considerable time drawing Daphne in various seductive poses, inspired by Gary Goldman's old collection of *Playboy* magazines.

It's a fact Goldman recalls vividly: "It was odd walking by Don's office with him in there at the drawing board surrounded by several, open, *Playboy* magazines. In the end, Don put Daphne in a very revealing one-piece 'thong' swimsuit with a sheer veil that partially covered her." Don Bluth was also responsible for designing the 50 different humorous ways in which Dirk could die including being eaten, squashed and disintegrated.

The script was another area that was largely affected by Don Bluth's team. As Dirk was the main character and dialogue might prove to cause difficulties with foreign language translation, it was scrapped in favour of grunts, groans and screams. Due to lack of funds, all voice acting was dealt with in-house with editor Dan Molina providing Dirk's expressions. Daphne, however, had to speak as she dispenses crucial information at the big finale featuring the fight with Singe the dragon. Stepping up to the role of air-head Daphne was key clean-up supervisor, Vera Lanpher.



ENTERING A 3D WORLD

In 2002, Rick Dyer, Gary Goldman and Don Bluth collaborated on a sequel to the franchise and concocted *Dragon's Lair 3D*. Released on PC, Xbox and GameCube, *Dragon's Lair 3D* saw Dirk enter a trap-infested castle to rescue the beautiful Daphne. Sadly, the game was missing many of its trademark death sequences, something that Goldman does regret: "We were disappointed that some of the humorous death situations could not be incorporated. We had many discussions about it and it was going to delay production and send costs through the roof." The game was condemned by the specialist press but still seemed to garner a following. "We have had a ton of fan mail that contradicts the critics' opinions," recalls Goldman. "But then, those that wrote in are probably die-hard *Dragon's Lair* fans. And, they were thrilled to see a revived Dirk in 3D."



» *Dragon's Lair 3D* boasted the same traditional animation of the original, but with more freedom to move

IN THE KNOW



- **» PUBLISHER:** CINEMATRONICS (US) ATARI (EUROPE)
- **» DEVELOPER:** AMS
- **» RELEASED:** 1983
- **» GENRE:** ARCADE GAME
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+





THE MAKING OF… DRAGON'S LAIR

"IT WAS ODD WALKING BY DON'S OFFICE WITH HIM IN THERE AT THE DRAWING BOARD SURROUNDED BY SEVERAL, OPEN, PLAYBOY MAGAZINES"



» *Dragon's Lair* was hyped to be the future of the Arcade game industry, but this wasn't to be

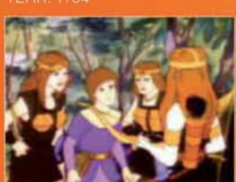

...Thanks to Classical Animation and Laser Disc Technology

» 22 minutes of footage featured in the game all created with classical animation

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TIME TRAVELLER
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, DVD
YEAR: 1991

THAYER'S QUEST
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, DVD
YEAR: 1984



THE FINAL PRODUCT

With AMS aiming to have the first laser-disc title in arcades, work on *Dragon's Lair* had to be swift. After initial development in October 1982, animation was started in January 1983, while Rick's team managed to compile three colour sequences by March for the Chicago Game Show. Around 130 artists and technicians were involved in development and the final product was finished in June, ready to ship to arcades in July.

In Europe, *Dragon's Lair* was licensed to Atari for production and manufacturing and the cabinet design differed to the American edition.

AMS field-tested the game at the Malibu Grand Prix El Monte, California and were staggered by the impact. Over 200 people were watching in amazement at the game's animation and the same thing was occurring at Cinematronics' own test in San Diego.

Its success in arcades was unprecedented, helped further by the cheaper price set by Cinematronics of 50 cents. As laser disc was an expensive technology in those days (the player alone was $1,000) the lower price gave the incentive for arcade owners to stock the machine. The immense popularity of the game meant many recouped the cost within a week. "When you went to an arcade, there was always a crowd around the *Dragon's Lair* machine and a line of people waiting to play the game. Many of the arcades placed extra monitors on top of the game cabinet so the crowd could see the animation."

Almost overnight, *Dragon's Lair* became a phenomenon leading to merchandise such as lunch boxes, underwear, stickers and board games, with even a cartoon series launching in 1984. Inevitably, the game was ported



» A still cell of Dirk the Daring ready to confront the enemy

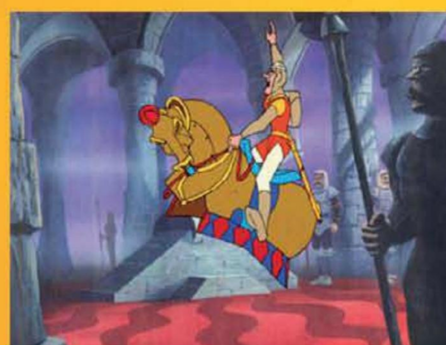


» A selection of drawings depicting Dirk's foe, the evil dragon Singe in a variety of poses

to over 18 computer formats although none of those had any input from either company, barring artwork.

Such success naturally meant a sequel, so a follow-up, *Space Ace*, released in 1984, was born although *Dragon's Lair* devotees would have to wait until 1991 to see *Dragon's Lair II* hit the arcades. Scenes that were left out of *Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp* would eventually see an appearance in *Dragon's Lair III* on PC. However, the popularity of laser-disc games trailed off and the sequels failed to capitalise on the original's success. Laser-disc players were notoriously unreliable, frequently breaking and some of the parts had been discontinued, making them difficult to repair.

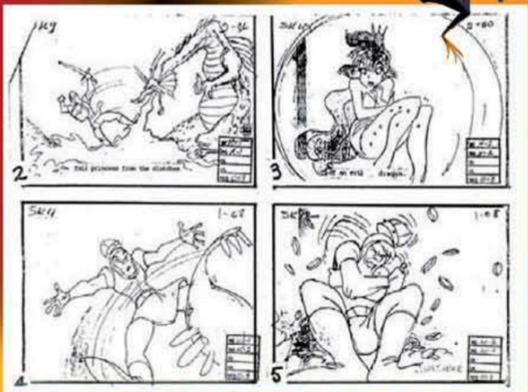
The limited nature of the gameplay also meant that the novelty of astounding visuals soon wore off. Goldman suggests why the sequels lacked the same impact on the market. "*Dragon's Lair* was a 'first', a breakthrough on the imagery for arcade games. Even though *Space Ace* was faster paced and had more spectacular imagery, the audiences had seen the first and were thrilled by it. Also, the arcade industry was in decline – *Dragon's Lair* sparked a momentary positive blip on the [business] screen, but didn't sustain it. With a declining attendance at the arcades, owners were avoiding financial risk; these arcade games were more expensive and not as many *Space Ace* machines were purchased by arcade owners. With regard to *Dragon's Lair II*, production was actually stopped in March of 1984 with it 100 per cent animated but only about 75 per cent in



» Riding this mechanical horse was just one of the many exhilarating moments from *Dragon's Lair*. Giddy up!



» Dirk got himself into all sorts of difficult situations – death usually followed…



» A storyboard planned out depicting Dirk trying to save Daphne from Singe the dragon



» Detailed drawings and descriptions were created months before animation proceeded

colour. The arcade industry was going down and Cinematronics would not complete the game. The game would not be completed until 1989, financed by Leland Corporation, a company that bought out Cinematronics."

THE LEGEND LIVES ON

Although the arcade game exists solely in the hands of devout collectors, the legacy of *Dragon's Lair* lives on. The Dragon's Lair Project is the largest resource dedicated to laser-disc based games and is the first port of call for anyone seeking out original versions of *Dragon's Lair*. The DAPHNE emulator is also available so fans and retro gamers can once again experience the thrills of the original.

Companies like Digital Leisure (**www.digitalleisure.com**) have made it their quest to bring *Dragon's Lair* to as many platforms as possible, 20 years after the release of the original. Digital Leisure first acquired the rights to *Dragon's Lair*, *Space Ace* and *Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp* in early 1997 and then went on to completely re-write the code to accurately copy the original arcade version. To squeeze such information onto a DVD however, requires some work as Paul Gold explains: "To port the classic laser-disc games to DVD and the compatible formats requires some serious finesse. Using a DVD authoring system like the ones a Hollywood studio would use to create DVDs for their movie releases, we are able to recreate the classic arcade experience."

Any regrets? Gary Goldman only has a few: "One thing is that there was a plan for: Chris Stone, the composer of the *Dragon's Lair* music to go to London to use a 40-piece orchestra to record the musical underscore for *Dragon's Lair II*. I wish we could've done it that way. Also, we have a script for a feature film of *Dragon's Lair*. I regret that we haven't been able to get the movie into production – and there are a lot of fans out there waiting for it. We've had some great meetings with the major studios. They know the title and like the script but no one has actually said yes. Think good thoughts. It may just happen."



» The death screen will be familiar to those not quick enough to dodge traps on screen



» The amusing death sequences kept players purposefully dying just to see the next animation

"AROUND 130 ARTISTS AND TECHNICIANS WERE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPMENT AND THE FINAL PRODUCT WAS FINISHED IN JUNE"



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Dragon's Lair
Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp
Dragon's Lair III: Curse Of Mordread
Dragon's Lair 3D
Space Ace

Thanks to Jeff Kinder from The Dragon's Lair Project (**www.dragons-lair-project.com**) for the interview and providing artwork and images for this article.
Credit goes to Jason Finn for offering additional information and images.
Thanks to Paul Gold of Digital Leisure for answering our questions.
Also thanks to Gary Goldman for taking the time out to be interviewed.

INTERVIEW WITH JEFF KINDER

Jeff is responsible for The Dragon's Lair Project. Retro Gamer asked some questions.

Retro Gamer: When did you set up The Dragon's Lair Project?
Jeff Kinder: The site went online on August 25, 1997. It had three pages: my story of how I restored my *Dragon's Lair* machine; a history of *Dragon's Lair, Space Ace* and *Thayer's Quest*; and an online version of the *Dragon's Lair* owner's manual. Today there are 900+ pages and the site has received near three million hits.

RG: What is it about *Dragon's Lair* and the sequels that are so appealing?
JK: Originally, it was the graphics/animation. Back in 1983 arcade game graphics were not what they are today. When *Dragon's Lair* came out, it was so different from anything ever seen before.

RG: Have you ever met the creators?
JK: Yes, I've met all four: Don Bluth, Gary Goldman, Rick Dyer and John Pomeroy. They are really nice guys and they appreciate what Dave Hallock and I have done with the site to keep the memory of *Dragon's Lair* alive.

RG: How can readers of *Retro Gamer* contribute?
JK: We are always looking for more information to add to the website to help keep the games remembered for a long time to come.





THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKE

MINIATURE LINK, GIANT ADVENTURE





- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1998
- **GENRE:** RPG
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** GAME BOY COLOR
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+



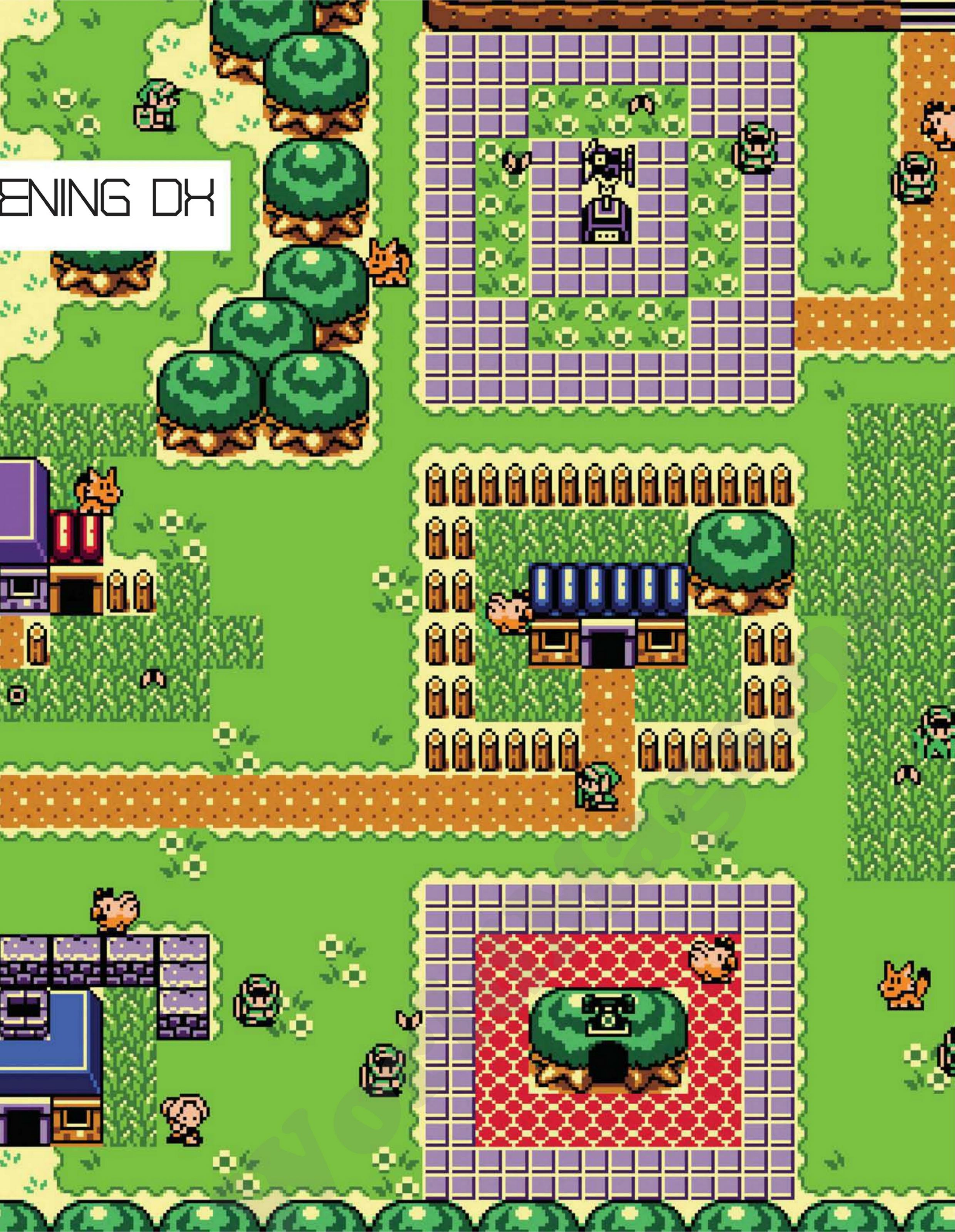
HISTORY

Ever since I picked up a cheap copy of *Link's Awakening* I've been unable to put the damn game down. Not surprising really as after reacquainting myself with this classic title it's easy to see what all the fuss was about.

It may have been superseded by the excellent Capcom titles, but *Link's Awakening* remains a startling title and is filled with plenty of magical moments. It's actually said by some gamers (in very hushed tones of course) that Link's quest for the mysterious Wind Fish is actually superior to *A Link To The Past*. While I don't share these sentiments, it's easy to see why so many people have fallen in love with Link's first portable adventure.

For starters it looks fantastic, with Link and the rest of Koholint Island's inhabitants being exceptionally well drawn and full of life. Granted, it's little more than a coloured-in port of the original Game Boy version, but that just proves that Nintendo got everything right the first time around. Still, it's not the extra colour that makes Koholint's folk stand out; it's the characterisation that Nintendo has breathed in to them. From old man Ulrira who's too shy to speak in person, to the delightful Marin who tends to Link at the beginning of the game, each individual is so full of life that the Game Boy's small screen can scarcely contain them.

Polished graphics and enjoyable characters tell only half the story though, as it's the dungeons and finely honed gameplay that remains the lynchpin that holds this glorious adventure together. From the moment you enter Tail Cave to the final climatic battle inside the Wind Fish's egg, *Link's Awakening* remains crafted to perfection and never once puts a foot wrong. Nintendo even included a new dungeon – look for it at the graveyard – ensuring that at least owners of the original game had another reason to buy this great RPG. If you're like me and have now completed *The Legend of Zelda: The Twilight Princess*, then return to *Link's Awakening*, you'll be glad you did.


ENING DX